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INTERFERENCE

BY

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"TWO MASTERS;" "DIANA BARRINGTON," ETC.



TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRYCE, PUBLISHER.

PZ 3
C875 Int

1958

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the Office of the Minister
of Agriculture, by WILLIAM BRYCE, in the year one thousand eight hundred
and ninety-one.

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INTERFERENCE.

CHAPTER I.

BALLINGOOLE.

"So sleeps the pride of other days."

THE town of Ballingooole has always awakened a certain amount of respectful surprise in the minds of strangers ; it is so amazingly unlike its name ! According to tourists who wish to pay it an extravagant compliment, it actually recalls a fine old English village, and, indeed, in its palmy days, Ballingooole would not have considered itself at all flattered by the comparison. Fifty years ago it was the stronghold of one of the most rigidly exclusive circles in the south of Ireland.

The wide, hilly street was lined by noble and imposing residences, that looked as if they had quitted country parks and pleasure grounds, and flocked together for company ; liberally planned gardens—celebrated for fruit and roses—sloped away from French windows at the rear of these mansions, to the very brink of a slow, brown canal—once glorified by fly boats, galloping teams and gay passengers, but now abandoned to lethargic barges, bearing freights of turf and manure. In the good old days the town was peopled by retired officers (naval and military), wealthy widows, and well-born spinsters, and actually numbered a baronet, and the brother of a viscount among its tenants.

There was an extensive collection of the best society in Ballingooole in former times; whist parties — concluding with very potent negus, goloshes and lanterns—substantial dinners, with weighty joints, strawberry fêtes, and hunt breakfasts, were of common occurrence. To tell the truth, "the town" was somewhat exclusive, and secretly turned up its nose at most of the county folk; but now, alas! times were changed, and the county turned up its nose at the town.

As years went on, ancient inhabitants who remembered the illuminations after Waterloo, and told anecdotes of George the Fourth, had been gradually gathered to their family vaults, and there was no inducement for other gentry to take their places. Some of the finest houses were let in tenements, and displayed small washings fluttering from upper windows. Several stood empty, with rusty area-railings, and shattered panes. Over the late abode of a baronet, hung three weather-beaten golden balls, and the mansion in which Mrs. General Moriarty once held her famous routs and card parties, thinks itself very lucky to be no worse than the police barrack!

Yes, the big houses now merge into shops, the shops into one-storeyed cottages, and the cottages into squat mud hovels, at the foot of the hill, down which Ballingooole has been going in more ways than one, for many years past. At the head of the street, two residences are still let to genteel tenants. Mrs. Finny, a doctor's widow, and her daughter; and Miss Dopping, an eccentric old maid, occupy the best houses in the place, for the traditional old song. This is a consideration with Mrs. Finny, a lady with a limited income; but Miss Dopping is rich, and could afford herself a house in Park Lane, if so disposed. She is the last of her family, the sole legatee of more than

one comfortable fortune, but no one would suppose it from her appearance, as she stalks down the street, tall, gaunt, and shabby. Although upwards of seventy years of age, she is as erect as a lamp-post, having been reared in the great back-board period ; and, despite her rusty black bonnet, frieze cloak, and ridiculous purple woollen gloves, there is no mistaking her for anything but a lady.

It was a soft November afternoon ; the hedges were not yet quite bare ; the haws—signs of a hard winter—clustered in thick red bunches, and yellow leaves, from overhanging beeches, fluttered reluctantly into the muddy road. There was not a sound to be heard in this still country spot, save the distant rattle of an ass's car, and the clump of Miss Dopping's umbrella, as she trudged along a foot-path, but few degrees drier than the highway, *en route* to pay her quarterly visit of ceremony, to her neighbour, Mrs. Redmond of Noone.

Another half mile of the greasy foot-path, and a lofty wall, topped with firs, comes into view, also a pair of big iron gates (once green), also a winding avenue—which is very green indeed—lined with dripping trees and over-grown laurels. In answer to a scream of "gate" in Miss Dopping's cracked falsetto, a fat old woman, with a shawl over her head and a key on her finger, came waddling out of the lodge, and said as she curtsyed profoundly :

"Good evening to you, me lady—a fine, soft day."

"And how are you, Juggy?" enquired Miss Dopping, with a keen glance into Juggy's round, red face.

"Faix, but poorly, me lady. I have had a cruel turn of them rheumatics; they catches me here, and here, and here"—clutching her elbows, back and knees, to illustrate her sufferings. "I feel as if

I was being crucified, like the saints and martyrs, but a good flannel petticoat would put the life in me," and she stared significantly at her interlocutor.

"It's only the damp weather—I feel it myself," returned Miss Dopping unsympathetically. "Any one above?" pointing up the avenue with her notable umbrella—an immense alpaca construction of distended proportions, likewise remarkable for a huge ivory handle, representing Death's head. When remonstrated with upon the subject of its size and age, its owner invariably replied :

"It was good enough for my mother, and is good enough for me, and will wear out fifty of your nasty flimsy gimcracks."

"Yes, me lady, I am afther opening the gate for Mrs. Finny and Miss Maria."

Miss Dopping ejaculated something inaudible, and looked over her shoulder, as if she had a mind to retreat.

"You may as well go up, Mam," urged Juggy, possibly divining her thoughts, "since you *are* so far. They are in it a good hour or more, and bid to be going soon, for there's no tay, or cake and wine offered *these* times !"

"Now what are they doing out here?" muttered the old lady to herself, as she plodded up the avenue. "They were here three days ago to my certain knowledge."

"Oh! so that's you, Pat?" to a shock-haired urchin, with bare red legs, who burst through the laurels, with a grin of expectation on his dirty little keen face.

"Let me see," diving into her pocket as she spoke, "were you at school to-day?"

"Begorra, I was, Mam."

"Then spell Ballingoole?"

Pat became painfully red, and his grin faded.

"Well, well, then never mind," producing a little knitted jug, containing coppers, and placing three pennies in his ready palm—

"Have you been out dark fowling since?"

"No, Mam," was his reply,—but he lied unto her.

"Because if you ever do such a cruel thing again, as blazing lanterns into poor birds' eyes, and knocking them down with sticks, you have seen the last of my coppers, as sure as my name is Sarah Dopping; so mind *that*," and with an emphatic thump of her umbrella, she tramped on.

The avenue at Noone was not imposingly long, and in a few minutes Miss Dopping had turned the corner, and was almost at the hall door.

Noone House was a straggling building, with no pretensions to beauty, dignity, or even antiquity—merely a big, grey mansion, with three rows of windows, and a glass porch, overlooking a low flat demesne, fringed with rows of dreary fir-trees. The back of Noone was flanked by a fine, old, seasoned garden, and many acres of worthless woods, which swarmed with rabbits. The land was poor and marshy—not to say boggy—neither useful nor ornamental, and the rabbits were an important item in Mrs. Redmond's income. She was the widow of an idle Irish gentleman, with a magnificent pedigree and a meagre fortune, who had departed this life, leaving her two hundred a year and one fair daughter—and she had endeavoured to make the most of both. At eighteen, Isabel Redmond was a remarkably handsome girl, the cynosure of many eyes, as she and her mother paraded about in showy costumes, to the strains of a seaside band. She was unusually lively: she could sing pretty little French songs, and act and dance in a sprightly manner, and was taken up, and asked about, by discriminating

matrons—with no unmarried daughters—and more than once had been upon the brink of an enviable match. Mrs. Redmond was ambitious, and her anticipations in the shape of a son-in-law modestly stopped just short of royalty. She strained every nerve—and she was an energetic woman—to dress her idol with fitting display, and to carry her into the most popular haunts of men (eligible men). Garrison towns, where cavalry were quartered, French watering places, and German spas, affected by rich and gouty bachelors, were visited in turn by Mrs. and Miss Redmond. These visits were brilliant, if brief; they generally made some gay, agreeable acquaintances—"birds of passage" like themselves, who voted them charming, and loudly regretted their departure—as did also their too trustful tradespeople, for Mrs. Redmond had a bad memory for small bills. She was an indefatigable chaperon, the most industrious and intriguing of her sex; and no galley slave, toiling at his oar, under the blazing Mediterranean sun, worked harder than she did, at the business—the vital business—of keeping up appearances, and "getting Isabella settled."

To say that the army list, the country families, and the peerage, were at her fingers' ends, may give some faint idea of her reading. As to writing, she was an untiring scribe, and deservedly merited a private secretary; corresponding with important acquaintances, with distant, aged, and wealthy connections, plying all with graceful, flattering letters, ditto photographs of Belle, and expensive Christmas cards; snatching ravenously at vague invitations; following up marching regiments, and anxiously courting the female relatives of rich young men. After ten years of knocking about Vanity Fair, the most pushing and plausible of vendors, her wares were no longer in their first

freshness, and alas! still unsold; for Miss Isabel, though beautiful, was said to have a cold heart, a hot temper, and a head as empty as her purse. Connections had died, and made no sign. Correspondents were dumb; promising partners of Belle's had revoked miserably and fled; fine acquaintances averted their eyes from what they considered a shabby old sponge, with a *passée* daughter, and the poor-house loomed immediately in her foreground. Mrs. Redmond was at the end of her credit and resources, and struggling in an angry sea of debt, when Providence threw her a plank. Old Brian Redmond, one of her many irons in the fire, having quarrelled with all his near relatives, departed this life, leaving (to spite the proverbially hated heir-at-law) Noone House and lands "to the pleasant widow woman with the pretty daughter"—whom by the way he had never seen.

Joy! Joy! one of the widow woman's many sprats had caught a salmon at last!

Naturally she was enchanted at her good fortune, but—there is always a but. The bequest was in Ireland, the best country in the world to live out of, in her opinion, and she was obliged to agree to two stipulations before she could call Noone her own. In the first place, she must guarantee to reside on the premises, and, secondly, she must share her home with, and be "a mother" to, Brian Redmond's orphan grand-niece—a relative to whom he bequeathed a legacy of two hundred pounds a year. If Mrs. Redmond objected to these clauses, she had the remedy in her own hands, and Noone passed on to another remote connection, one of the Redmonds of Ballyredmond—a childless, rich, old man. Mrs. Redmond hated the conditions of the will, but she was socially and financially bankrupt; better to exist in Ireland.

than to starve in England ; her health was bad, her energy abated, and after wearying the inmates of a cheap London boarding-house, with pompous boastings of " my place in Ireland," " my shooting," " my Irish property," went over, and entered into her kingdom, with a curious mixture of satisfaction and disgust. She had now been residing on her own acres for three years, saving and scraping with extraordinary enjoyment, ignoring ancient debts, and discovering a fresh and novel interest in leasing the rabbit warrens, selling fruit, fowl and turf, keeping few servants, no equipages, and finding her excitements in small country gossip, feuds with the butcher, and startling domestic economies. There was also old Brian's other legacy—Elizabeth, or Betty, Redmond, with her two hundred pounds a year, which her self-styled " Aunt " coolly appropriated for her board and lodging, having removed her from school when she was seventeen years of age, believing that she could find a more excellent use at home for Betty and her money—in which belief the astute old lady was subsequently most fully justified. But enough of the inmates of Noone. For all this time we are keeping Miss Dopping shivering on its hall door steps. At first she rang gently, but firmly. After a pause, firmly, but not gently. Finally, a wild passionate peal ; and then the distant slamming of doors, and a heavy deliberate footfall came in answer to her summons.

Miss Dopping was unmistakably put out, because there had been a delay in letting her in, and when the servant volunteered to part her and her umbrella, she was, to say the least of it, a little short in her manner. The old lady was presently ushered into a drawing-room, cold as a vault. From an adjoining apartment, the babble of female tongues and shrill laughter was distinctly audible ;

in a few minutes she was requested to "step into the study," and here she discovered Mrs. and Miss Redmond, and Mrs. and Miss Finny, disposed in four arm chairs, round a comfortable turf fire.

CHAPTER II.

GOSSIP—(WITHOUT TEA).

"Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women."

—RICHARD III.

"DEAR me, Miss Dopping!" exclaimed her hostess, rising with an effort from the depths of a low seat. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. It is ages since I have seen you! Do come near the fire. Ah, I forgot, you are not one of its worshippers, like me. I would rather dispense with my dinner than my fire!"

"You would not say that, if you had tried it," rejoined Miss Dopping, seating herself bolt upright, and gazing sharply around her.

Mrs. Redmond shook her head from side to side, like a great pendulum, and leant back in her chair, and crossed her arms over her extensive waist. She was a majestic matron, dressed in black, with heavy regular features, little hard yellowish eyes, and a deliberate delivery. Her thick grey hair was covered with a black cap, and her plump, hands with a pair of soiled grey kid gloves, minus their finger-tops.

Isabel or Belle—"Belle and the Dragon" were the names by which she and her mother were known in certain profane circles—loured in an easy attitude in a basket chair, holding an *Irish Times* between her face and the fire. It was a handsome face, and she did well to protect it. Belle was a young lady of, shall we say, seven and twenty?—at any rate she says so herself, and

looks no more, and of course every woman is the age she looks—with a pair of dangerous black eyes, straight black brows, a short upper lip, a pointed chin, and a sufficient supply of wavy dark hair. A small, graceful figure and a slender foot, were not the least of her attractions. But at present, neither figure nor foot, are seen to any advantage, for she wears a dilapidated old red tea gown, with ragged laces and stained front, and a pair of extremely *passée* slippers. In fact Belle's toilette must not be too closely scanned.

"Now, don't look at me! Don't look at me," she said, gesticulating with much animation, and playfully holding the newspaper between Miss Dopping and herself. "I know I am an awful object; but in winter, I never adorn myself unless I am going out—there is no one to dress for!"

"No *men* you mean," amended Miss Dopping, severely.

"Yes, I do. There is not a man at this side of Ballingoole, except Major Malone and Dr. Moran."

"And *he* is an old woman," observed Miss Finny tartly—but naturally the daughter of the late practitioner had but scant mercy on her father's successor.

"You are a great visitor these times, Mrs. Finny," remarked Miss Dopping, pointedly.

"Well, dear, just once in a way, you know," returned Mrs. Finny apologetically. "Only just once in a way."

She was a meek little lady, with a pretty, faded face, and a plaintive whine in her voice, totally different from her tall, masculine-looking daughter, who had hard features, a square jaw, and a mouth like the slit of a letter box—and in that mouth a renowned and dreaded tongue—Maria Finny was about forty-five years of age, embittered against all mankind, and the implacable enemy

of the young and well-favoured of her own sex. Poor Maria! In her life there had been but little sunshine, and not one ray of love, or the shadow of a lover. A long monotonous tale without a plot, without a hero—she had not even a hobby or a pet, she did not read, paint, or write; she superintended the scanty *ménage*, she ruled her mother, and lived meagrely and discontentedly, an aggrieved, soured woman, with an unfulfilled youth, and a bleak, hopeless future; and yet Maria had ten times more capacity for passionate, unselfish love than brilliant Belle Redmond with her enchanting smile and sympathetic eyes. Perhaps, if Maria's upper lip had been half an inch shorter, if her mouth had been of more reasonable dimensions, it might have made a vast difference in her destiny—who knows?

"We thought we would just look in as we were passing," she said, continuing her mother's explanation, "and tell Mrs. Redmond the news."

"Yes," broke in Mrs. Redmond, with unusual animation. "There is a stir in town, haven't you heard?"

"That Peter Brock's daughter is going to America after all? Of course I know *that*," replied Miss Dopping contemptuously.

"Not at all," said Maria. "Far finer news than about Mary Brock! I met Mrs. Malone driving herself into town in the donkey car; she seemed quite excited, and her face all flushed in patches. She had just had a telegram; her son, Mr. Holroyd, has come home from India on sick leave, and he has not given her any time to think it over, for he arrives to-night."

"Delightful!" ejaculated Belle, dropping her paper, and clapping her hands softly.

"He has not been at Bridgetstown these five years, and then only for a few days," remarked

Mrs. Finny. "He and the Major don't get on. Nor stable their horses together."

"And no wonder," retorted Maria forcibly. "Young Holroyd is a gentleman, and Major Malone is a gambling, greedy, selfish, old bully, and a nice respectable example for his son, Denis, spending half his time on race-courses, betting away every penny, and leaving his family paupers. It's no wonder Mrs. Malone's hair falls out, and she looks so heart-broken! She only keeps three servants now, and sells the vegetables and fruit, and the buttermilk, a penny a can. To my certain knowledge, she has had that brown bonnet this three years, and Cuckoo's boots are a shame and a disgrace."

"At any rate, she has only herself to thank," returned Mrs. Redmond, leaning still further back in her chair, and placing two capacious slippers on the fender, where they had a fairly prominent effect.

Seeing Miss Finny's eyes fastened on them, she said: "Well, yes, Maria, I am not ashamed of them! My London bootmaker declared that it was a real pleasure to see a foot of a fine natural size! I know you pride yourself on wearing threes, but I call your feet disjointed deformities. However, about Mrs. Malone. Holroyd left her well off, a pretty widow, with one little boy; she might have left well alone, instead of marrying a good-for-nothing half-pay major."

"But you know, dear, he had a splendid property then," protested Mrs. Finny, in a piteous tone.

"He has no splendid property now," said Maria sharply; "there will not be an acre for Denis, and serve him right; an idle young scamp, it's my belief, he will never pass for the medical."

"He is the apple of his mother's eye," drawled Mrs. Redmond. "She slaves for him, and screws for him, and keeps all his scrapes from the Major."

"And the Major's scrapes from her son George," supplemented Maria, with a disagreeable giggle.

"Yes, the Major is a sore trial to all that are about him," resumed Mrs. Redmond. "No one is to spend but himself. He must have good dinners and cigars and wine——"

"Whisky, you mean," interrupted Maria with a snort.

"Well, whisky," impatiently, "and a high dogcart, and curly-brimmed hats and patent-leather boots, but everyone else may live on potatoes and salt, and slave for him like niggers, or he roars like a mad tiger, and no one dare say a word."

"I believe George Holroyd said a good many words to him, the last time he was here," replied Maria, expressively.

"Yes, and he took it out of George Holroyd's mother, as soon as his back was turned," whined Mrs. Finny — who always spoke as if she was on the verge of tears—"and he has spent every penny of her fortune. I can't think how they live at all; the poor things!"

"Oh, Mr. Holroyd helps them," explained Mrs. Redmond. "Jane Bolland, at the Post Office, has often seen his cheques; he has a good private income, besides his pay."

"Miss Dopping," said Belle, suddenly addressing the old lady, who sat in grim, observant silence, with her purple gloves, exactly crossed on the Death's head handle of her umbrella; "you are the oldest inhabitant, and know everything; do tell us all about Mr. Holroyd."

"Stuff and nonsense, Isabella! you are taking me for Jane Bolland. Go to her; *she* will tell you how many shirts he has to his back, how many cigars he smokes, and how much he owes his tailor: only give her time."

"No, no, I am not thinking of Jane. I want you to tell me—I mean to tell us—what he has a year?"

"How should I know?" snarled Miss Dopping.

"A thousand?" in a coaxing tone.

"Have *you* a thousand?" very gruffly.

"But, indeed, dear, he must have something handsome," pleaded Mrs. Finny, "for he keeps polo ponies, and racing ponies in India, and has been very kind to his mother."

"Now, Miss Dopping," urged Belle boldly, "do be nice to me, do tell me all about him. I am dying to see him."

"I'll be bound you are!" returned the old lady ferociously.

"How old is he?" continued her undaunted questioner.

"Not much younger than you are yourself," was the brutal reply, "within a year or so of thirty."

"Oh, you dear old thing!" cried Belle, with a somewhat dangerous gleam in her eye, but a playful wave of her paper, "you always must have your little joke."

Miss Dopping detested Belle's familiarities; she would almost as soon have had her nose pulled as be called "a dear old thing." She was on the verge of some savage retort, when Mrs. Finny, who was still romantic, exclaimed pathetically: "He is so handsome in his photograph, so dark and soldierly looking—just a darling fellow!"

Then he does not take after his dear mamma," sneered Maria. "She is so pale and faded, she always reminds *me* of a white rat."

"She has had enough to fade her, poor soul," said Mrs. Redmond. "She has suffered for her folly. Now I may tell you, without vanity, that in my day, I was a young woman of remarkable personal attractions. I was quite a toast, and I

was called 'the Lily of Lippendale.' " (It required a strong effort of the imagination to suppose that this bulky old lady, with a very sallow complexion, could ever have been the Lily of anywhere.) "I had poems written about me, and people used to wait outside our house to see me pass, and yet, though quite a girlish widow, I would never listen to a second suitor."

Here Miss Finny sniffed incredulously, and her mother said: "I wonder if Mr. Holroyd will see many changes."

"To be sure he will," snapped Maria; "why wouldn't he? He will see the Major redder and stouter, his mother whiter and thinner, Cuckoo as ugly as one of her own young namesakes, and Denis, an idle ne'er-do-weel, sponging on his family, and playing spoil five in the stables."

"Don't you find it very cold over there?" screamed Miss Dopping, suddenly addressing a figure in a distant window.

A girl who was ripping some article of dress by the fading daylight, looked up and glanced interrogatively at Mrs. Redmond.

"Yes, Betty, my darling, I am sure you cannot see any longer; you must be perished; come to the fire."

In answer to this invitation, Betty approached and stretched a pair of thin red hands towards the blaze. She was tall and slender, and had a low, broad forehead, delicate features, and quantities of bright brown hair. To a superficial observer, she was merely a gaunt, pale, shabby girl, who looked both cold and cross, and not to be named in the same year with our pretty, sparkling Belle, who was toasting her toes so comfortably on the fender. But when the sun lit up the golden tints of her magnificent hair; when the wind gave her white cheeks a wild rose tinge; when a smile illuminated

her fathomless grey eyes, Betty, too, had her admirers.

"Mr. Holroyd will be quite a catch," remarked Mrs. Redmond, rubbing her hands complacently, "and those Wilde girls will be sure to ask him over, although they have not called on his mother for years. He will show a *very* poor spirit if he goes near them; they never ask anyone inside their house except young men; they are always having 'friends of their brothers,' as they call them, to stay at Mantrap Hall, as you have named it, Maria; and a capital name it is."

"I wonder if he sings?" said Belle meditatively.

"Like his mother," exclaimed Maria, casting up her eyes to the ceiling.

"I hope *not*, poor, unfortunate woman! her singing reminds me of a dog baying at the moon. She ought to be muzzled at the piano."

Miss Dopping looked as if she thought some one else might as well be muzzled too!

"Mother," continued Belle, "we really must have the piano tuned, and must make some smart aprons and caps for Eliza. I shall write to Madame Rosalie by to-night's post. I have not a single decent dress, neither have you."

"What a stir, and what a fuss about one very ordinary young man!" growled Miss Dopping. "After all, he may be engaged to some girl in India!"

"He may," agreed Belle, "but, at any rate, he is not ordinary, is he, Maria?" turning a look of tragic appeal on Miss Finny, "you have seen him?"

"Yes, years ago; he was nothing very remarkable; he had nice eyes and a good figure, and looked like a gentleman which is more than we can say for his step-brother, Denis."

Maria's verdict was accepted in solemn affirmative silence, and, after a little desultory conversa-

tion on a less absorbing topic than Mr. Holroyd, the Finny's and Miss Dopping departed into the darkness of a chill November afternoon, at the thirsty hour of five o'clock.

As they poked their way down the greasy avenue, Maria exclaimed: "What a mean old woman! She had not the heart to offer us a cup of tea. Mark my words, mother, Belle Redmond will do her best to catch George Holroyd."

"Why? What makes you say that, dearie?"

"Why? a child could tell you, and give you twenty reasons," said Miss Finny contemptuously. "She hates Noone, and would marry a tinker, to get away from it. She is not as young as she was, and is desperately afraid of being an old maid. She adores officers, and would give ten years of her life to go to India. Mr. Holroyd is in the army; his regiment is in India; he has private means, and is so to speak 'made to her hand'; she will do all in her power to marry him. What do you say, Miss Dopping?"

"I say that I hope the Lord will deliver him," replied the old lady very piously.

"Amen!" responded Maria Finny, with the fervency of a prayer.

CHAPTER III.

THE MALONES OF BRIDGETSTOWN.

"For there's nae luck about the house."

—W. J. MICKLE.

BETWEEN Bridgetstown and Noone, lay Ballingoo, and the reasonable visiting distance of one Irish mile. Bridgetstown was a great, staring white house, with two low wings, that stood familiarly close to the road, although screened from the vulgar gaze by a high hedge of impenetrable laurels.

According to Major Malone, "the front of the house was at the back," by which truly Irish statement, he meant that all the principal apartments opened south, into a delightful pleasure ground, shaded by fine old trees, brilliant with flowers, and bounded by the grey walls of a celebrated garden. No one, driving up to the bleak and rather mean entrance, would believe that the mere act of walking across a hall could create such a total transformation of aspect. It was like passing from winter into summer, and exchanging the shores of the White Sea for the Mediterranean. The Bridgetstown pleasure ground was a notorious sun-trap, the rendezvous of half the bees in the Barony, and the ruination of any delicate complexion. Flowers that drooped and died elsewhere, here blazed forth in flaunting profusion; invalid cuttings sprang to health at once, and the frail, fastidious, "Marechal Niel" and "Cloth of Gold," draped the garden entrance as with a yellow mantle. Bridgetstown was a curious anomaly. The great white mansion was out of place by the roadside, and the pretty demesne that lay to the right of a long range of walls (enclosing grounds and stable-yards) looked empty and houseless. A noble avenue of limes ran parallel to the garden, and led to no place in particular, and everywhere in general. It seemed as if the house had had a violent quarrel with the park and avenue, and was on the point of quitting the premises. The farms belonging to the property were also scattered over the country in the most inconvenient directions, but Major Malone, in his high, red-wheeled dog-cart, made a virtue of inspecting them very frequently; his care-takers could have told another tale! When his credulous wife supposed him to be making a martyr of himself, and superintending ploughing, hay-making or

threshing, he was generally attending some race or coursing meeting, or framing himself in the bow window of the Kildare Street Club.

Enough of the exterior of Bridgetstown. It is a raw November night; a penetrating drizzle is descending; let us go inside, and join the family at dinner.

A glance is sufficient to show that the house was built in the days when money was no object with the Malones, and when there was no struggling for cheap effect. The balustrades are carved oak; the door solid mahogany; the marble chimney pieces, works of Italian art; the furniture, plate, and china were all of the best of their kind, a hundred years ago. True, the china is now cracked; the plate somewhat battered; the mahogany a good deal scratched; the chintz and brocade faded; but nevertheless there is an air of respectability, a glimmer of the light of other days, lingering about the premises, that fails not to impress all strangers. The dining-room is large and lofty, papered with a dismal flock paper, the very touch of which thrills one to the tips of one's finger nails; the three windows are decently draped in dark moreen curtains; a fine fire blazes up the chimney, in front of which blinks "Boozle," a monstrous red tom cat, the dearly beloved *protégé* of Major Malone—a cat with a strong individuality, and considerable sporting rights as to rabbits and young game. Even the attractive aroma of a hot roast sirloin, does not entice him from the hearthrug—for he has eaten, and is filled with a prime young cock pheasant, and prefers his comfortable, and contemplative attitude beside the fender,

The dinner table is square, and is lighted up with silver branch candlesticks; the forks and spoons are silver, too; also the dish covers, wine

coolers, and flagons; the tumblers are real cut glass, and the china mostly old Worcester, though here and there eked out with a terrible blue and white Delft plate. There are no flowers to be seen, nor any attempt at table decoration, unless six rather greasy dinner mats come under that denomination. Mrs. Malone, who is head cook, chief butler, upper-house maid, and valet, has no time for such details, and in a family where the master is particular about his shirts, his boots, and, above all, his dinner, and there is a large house to be kept habitable, cows to milk, the door to answer, lamps, fires, and plate to be attended to, the mistress of but three servants must put her shoulder to the wheel. This mistress is a woman of about eight and forty, and looks much older. She is thin and colourless, and her faded fair hair, displays a very wide parting; her blue eyes are timid to abjectness, her mouth has a pitiful droop, and her once pretty hands, are coarse and scarred with manual labour; she wears a black (cotton) velvet body, and a large pink topaz brooch and earrings, in order to look smart in the eyes of her eldest son. Poor Lucy Holroyd! you thought you had taken a fresh lease of happiness when you married bluff, handsome, hearty Major Malone. Little did you guess that you were offering your slender shoulders to a pitiless old man of the sea. Major Malone is still bluff, but no longer either hearty or handsome; his head is bald, but he endeavours to disguise the miserable truth, by arranging an effeminately long lock round and round his bare poll, and affixing it thereto with bandoline—or, it may be, glue. Occasionally, in a high wind, or in a moment of intense agitation, this lock has been known to come down, and float wildly in the breeze, like a demented pigtail. To the Major "this lock is wondrous fair," and his

most cherished vanity, and he has the impudence to discourse of "bald old fogies" with contemptuous commiseration. He is dressed in evening clothes, with much care and precision; wears a flower in his button hole, and a diamond in his shirt, and is altogether a superior being to his shabby wife and daughter. As he deftly carves the sirloin before him, we get an inkling of his true character. For whom are those three large slices from the undercut that he so artfully sets aside, to soak in the gravy? The remainder he apportions with an impartial hand, and when the undercut is finished, he turns over the joint, and helps his customers from the less toothsome portion, but he does not dream of sharing those three appetising morsels reserved for his own most particular palate, and it is thus with him always! Whoever goes short, it will not be Tom Malone. Number one must have the best of everything. Leaving him to enjoy his dinner, we pass on to his son Denis, a young man of four and twenty, who has not thought it worth while to make any change in his dress. Denis is undeniably plain; even his fond mother—who shuts her eyes to so many things—cannot close them to this fact. He has dark, wiry, unmanageable hair, deep-set grey eyes, heavy eyebrows, heavy features, a hopeful moustache, and huge ears that stand from his head like the handles of a jug. When we add that he has a large powerful frame, with hands and feet to correspond, that he slouches as he walks, and wears his hat on the back of his head, his portrait is complete. Denis is clever and has a fair share of brains; he is one of those birds "who can sing, and won't sing." Whilst others toil along the dreary road of learning, he can skim the ground with comparative ease. He has a taste for mathematics, a taste for surgery, a quick eye, a steady

nerve, and a profound faith in Denis Malone ; but he has a still greater taste for singing racy songs of his own composition, for playing "spoil five" and "poker," and brewing whisky punch. However, in spite of his innate idleness and love of loafing and low company, his poor infatuated mother believes that he will be a credit to her yet. "Cuckoo," his sister, is but fourteen ; therefore we will hope that she may improve, and will not cruelly epitomise her features ; suffice to say that she is pale, long-legged, and sandy, and characterised by extreme unreserve, and insatiable curiosity.

Miss Malone is her mother's right hand, a first-rate household adjutant, but her father and brother's pest ; she acts as revising editor to all their best stories. She knows when Denis is at Nolan's (the nearest public-house), instead of being, as the Major imagines, in bed with toothache. She knows *why* her mother hides the key of the cellarette, and why her father never opens, but angrily tears up, all communications in certain blue envelopes. In short, she is wise beyond her years. Opposite to Cuckoo sits George, the new arrival, in whose honour are the branch candlesticks, topaz ornaments, and dessert. He is a good-looking young man, with a broad forehead, a pair of very expressive eyes, and a carefully cultivated dark moustache, and, but that his aquiline nose is too large for his face (or it may be that his face is too thin for his nose) he would be remarkably handsome ; well-favoured, well-dressed, and well-bred, he makes an effective Valentine to his brother's Orson. In spite of his gallant efforts, conversation languishes ; queries about hunting and shooting fall woefully flat ; his relatives evince but a tepid interest in India, and his homeward voyage ; to tell the truth, the Major's great mind is

concentrated on his plate. Mrs. Malone's thoughts are distracted by an alarming letter which she received from the family grocer, as she came down to dinner, and Denis is wondering how his brother makes his tie, and if he will lend him twenty pounds. Cuckoo, who has the unintelligible desire to talk, common to her sex and years, converses affably for all, and keeps her unhappy mother on thorns, lest she should disclose too many domestic secrets. Having disposed of her pudding with startling rapidity, she said, as she scraped her plate :

"Mother made this plum pudding herself; she always makes the sweets now. Last Christmas, Eliza, the cook, was drunk; she sent the pudding up, stuck all over with lighted matches; it looked so funny; she drank the whisky! Once she got at father's whisky, that he keeps——"

"There, that will do, Cuckoo," said the Major, sharply. "Hold your tongue; I wish there was a fly blister on it."

By the time the decanters were placed before him, the Major's own tongue was loosened, and he proceeded to discuss the neighbourhood with considerable animation. *Apropos* of their own vicinity, he said: "Nothing but parsons and old women about here now, George! Great changes, you will hardly know any one in the parish. Eh! what? what?"

He usually concluded his sentence with this query, repeated as sharply as a postman's knock.

"There are the Finnys and Miss Dopping," said Mrs. Malone, "and the Wildes of Wildpark, and the Moores of Roskeen. I don't think you know Mrs. Redmond. She came since you were here last. She has a daughter——"

"I should rather think she *had* a daughter," interrupted the Major, rapturously. "There is not

a handsomer girl between this and Dublin. Eh! what? what?"

"Girl!" echoed his wife peevishly. "I would scarcely call her a girl; she has been in every garrison town in——"

"Come, come, that will do!" exclaimed the Major, rudely. "We all know you don't like her. What handsome woman ever *is* appreciated by the old and ugly of her own sex! I only wish I was a young man for her sake," and he gulped down a bumper of family port.

"I'd be sorry to be hanging since she was thirty," muttered Denis, who generally sided with his mother.

"Mrs. Redmond is dreadful," said Cuckoo, bravely, "she draws out her words as if they cost money, and she is fearfully stingy and mean, she always comes here at meal-time on purpose.

"Yes, she is a fine old soldier, and knows her way about," admitted the Major. "She never wants much for the asking, from a plough to a pie dish, and she has a voice that would crack an egg. Eh! what?"

"She came here the other day," continued Cuckoo, volubly; "mother was cooking, and could not see her, but she and Belle marched in, all the same, and said that they would wait for tea. We happened to have nice hot soda cakes, and Mrs. Redmond calmly took off her gloves and poured out tea, and ate three buttered cakes, and pressed them on Belle, just as if she was in her *own* house, and then said, 'Cuckoo, as your mother has a headache, she cannot eat soda cakes; you have had as many as are good for you, and it is a pity to let them go downstairs, so I shall carry them off.' And she actually made me do them up in paper, and took them home in her muff. Did you ever know such a greedy old thing?"

"I never knew her match," growled Denis, in his deep voice. "The idea of making that unfortunate girl drag her about the country in a bath-chair the way she does; she ought to be prosecuted for cruelty to animals. Betty is worth a thousand of Belle, with her airs and her eyes, and her humbug. Betty has no nonsense about her, and is as plucky as the devil."

"And who is Betty?" enquired George.

"You might remember her in old Redmond's time," replied the Major. "A girl in short frocks, spending her holidays at Noone—a sort of poor relation. Her mother died when she was an infant, and her father was drowned, trying to save another man's life. She is now a tall slip of a girl, that comes into a room like a blast of wind, and runs mad over the country, with her dogs and Cuckoo."

"She is a beautiful, warm-hearted, young creature," protested Mrs. Malone, with a tinge of colour in her pale face.

"*Beautiful!* Oh Lord," shouted the Major, derisively.

"And has two hundred a year of her own," continued his wife——

"Which Mrs. Redmond saves her the trouble of spending," supplemented Denis in his deep voice, "and makes her go all the messages, and weed the garden, and draw the bath-chair. She is warranted quiet in single harness, spirited but gentle—fine action, mouth, and manners."

"Betty does not mind," proclaimed Cuckoo; "she is never happy unless she is busy. George, I am sure you will like Betty."

"At any rate, she is a pleasant contrast to Belle, who spends half her time in bed, reading novels. And has the devil's own temper," remarked Denis in his basso profundo.

"Hold your scurrilous tongue, sir," bawled the Major. "What the deuce do *you* know about Miss Redmond?" Then to George, "She has a fine high spirit, which I must say I admire in a woman"—that is, in a woman outside of his own family—"she has been accustomed to the best society all her life, and to a great deal of attention, and dozen of admirers. She is very gay and lively, and finds it uncommonly slow at Noone. Poor girl, she says every week seems a year. I tell her if she wants to make the time fly, she has only to draw a bill at three months. Eh! what? what? She's a deuced pretty creature, and, begad, she and I are uncommonly good friends."

"She *flatters* father, that's why he likes her," explained the fearless Cuckoo, as her mother rose from table; and before the Major had time to launch some furious and fitting retort, Cuckoo was already giggling in the hall.

Bridgetstown was a house with long and windy passages, and Mrs. Malone and her daughter hurried into the drawing-room, whilst the men drew their chairs up to the dining-room fire. The Major lit a cigar, and began to talk "shop" (as a compliment to his step-son), reviving former memories of obsolete drill, and ancient mess anecdotes. George, on his part assumed a polite interest in the recent autumn meetings and the odds on the Liverpool, and endeavoured to sympathise with the Major's bitter disappointment in "the Blazeaway filly," whom he had backed heavily at Fairyhouse races. Meanwhile Denis yawned, pulled Boozle's tail (thereby causing Boozle to lash it about furiously) and, when his father was not looking, helped himself liberally to port. After the Major had related his favourite stock story, about a staff officer, a river and a chest of drawers, George and his brother joined their relatives in

the drawing-room, whilst the elder gentleman adjourned to his own den, to his pipe, his sporting papers, and his betting-book. The drawing-room was cold and cheerless, despite a fire and lamps. Mrs. Malone rarely entered it, save to dust the ornaments, and superintend Cuckoo's practising. In answer to her brother George's request, Cuckoo seated herself before the grand piano with the utmost self-possession, and proceeded to perform a series of the most amazing exploits on the key board. She thumped the instrument as though she had a spite against it—which she had—and clawed it like a cat. Meanwhile her two brothers stood near the fire and Mrs. Malone hemmed handkerchiefs close to a reading lamp. Once or twice she glanced furtively at the pair on the rug. Could they both be her sons? It seemed strange that that tall young man with his air of distinction, that courteous, scrupulously-dressed stranger, could be brother to Denis, with his round shoulders, wild hair, and rude ways. Their voices were widely different. Denis possessed a deep, uncultivated brogue, and inherited his father's bullying delivery. George spoke with a polished English accent. Their manners also were in strong contrast. George stood up when she entered a room, placed a chair for her, and listened to all she said with deferential attention. Denis contradicted her freely and frankly, and would as soon have thought of standing on his head, as of offering her a seat. She was his mother, and therefore of course devoted to him. It was her business to mend his clothes and his socks; fill his purse, and hide his scrapes; all this was *her* duty, and his——? Well, he offered her his cheek to kiss every morning, when he was at home, and wrote to her regularly—if he wanted money—when he was abroad. George

resembled his father. Poignant, melancholy memories stole into her mind, as she watched him through misty eyes—memories long banished by heavy cares, and heavy bills, and selfish domestic tyranny. What a different life hers might have been, had George Holroyd lived :

Cuckoo, who had now brought her performance to a violent end, came over to the fire, and stared expectantly at her elder brother, with a half simpering, half impudent expression. "Thank you, Cuckoo," he said with a dubious smile.

"Thank you for what?" she enquired with a giggle.

"Well, since you ask me, for leaving off."

"I hate music!" thrusting her bony shoulders out of her frock.

"So I should imagine! Mother, won't you sing something?"

At this suggestion Denis opened his mouth in amazement, and then burst into a loud and scornful guffaw.

"For goodness sake don't ask the Mater to sing; you don't know her voice now; it's like a cracked fog-horn."

George turned sharply to his brother, with an angry light in his eyes, but Mrs. Malone interposed hastily :

"I never sing now; you forget that I am quite an old woman, my dear George," and she smiled up into his face a pitiful smile.

But the little attention had pleased her; she had been a renowned singer in her day. What a pathetically sad little sentence that is to many a woman—"In her day." How short is that day! How fleeting—how soon forgotten by all but herself.

"How nicely your clothes fit, George," remarked his sister. "What a swell you are!" stroking his coat admiringly.

George made no reply : he could not return the compliment. Cuckoo's shabby frock was nearly up to her knees, her shoes were white at the toes, and her pigtail was tied with a boot lace.

"We have never sat here since Aunt Julia was over, last spring," continued Cuckoo, as she threw some turf on the fire.

"Oh, has *she* paid a visit here? I did not know."

"I should rather think she *has* paid a visit—a visitation," rejoined Denis, who was lolling with his hands in his pocket and his eyes half shut—an affectation of indolence being his best substitute for easy self-possession. "We thought we should have had to go away ourselves to get rid of her. We were afraid that she would be like the man who came with his carpet bag to stay from Saturday till Monday, and remained for twenty years."

"She would have gone if she *could*," retorted Cuckoo mysteriously ; glancing at her mother, who was holding a parley with some one at the door.

"What on earth do you mean? what was to prevent her?" enquired Denis ; "the road was clear."

"I won't tell you, for you hate Aunt Julia, but I'll tell George"—taking him firmly by the button-hole, and speaking in a whisper.

George rather mistrusted his gentle sister's artless confidences, but there was no escape for him.

"She had no money for her journey ; twice she had it sent over, and twice mother borrowed it, so she could not get away ; she was here three months."

"Nonsense, Cuckoo," said her unwilling listener, drawing back ; "you should not say such things."

"What has she been telling you?" asked Mrs. Malone, rather anxiously, as she resumed her work.

"Only that we never sit here, mother, or have a

fire in this room, or dessert, or coffee, or wine," continued this pleasant child. "It's all account of *you*, George," giving him a playful poke.

She was excessively proud of her handsome brother. Mrs. Malone reddened to her liberal parting, and fidgetted uneasily on her chair, and George said :

"Surely, mother, you are not going to make a stranger of *me*?"

"The fatted calf for the prodigal son! Eh! What? What?" said Denis, mimicking his father, with a loud unmeaning laugh.

"Prodigal son!" screamed Cuckoo. "That's yourself. Do you know, the last time he came home, George, he walked the whole way from Dublin; he was nearly barefoot, and he had pawned——"

"*Cuckoo!*" exclaimed her mother authoritatively, "go and see if the passage door is shut; now go at once."

Cuckoo and Denis collided in the doorway, and left the room together; and presently voices in angry recrimination, and the sound of a hearty smack, and loud sobs, were heard in the hall; then a slamming of doors, a roar from the Major's study, and silence.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MALONE OPENS HER MOUTH.

"Let the world slide, let the world go;
A fig for care, and a fig for woe!
If I can't pay, why! I can owe."

—HEYWOOD.

"MOTHER," said George, after a truly eloquent pause, "why don't you send Cuckoo to school? her accent is frightful, and——"

"I know, I know," interposed Mrs. Malone,

laying down her work, with a dismal sigh. "I am afraid she must strike you as ill-mannered and pert; Julia thought so, too; but then she told a whole room full of visitors that Julia was coming as soon as she had put in her new teeth; the child is a great help to me in the house, and remarkably open and truthful, as you may notice,

"Yes, the very densest must admit *that*, but the naked truths she introduces so gleefully are not always pleasant additions to a family circle."

"Perhaps not—perhaps she is too outspoken; she ought to go to school. We must think it over, but in these hard times, George, I don't know how we are to afford the expense."

"But I always understood that Major Malone had his land in his own hands."

"I am sorry to say he has, but farming is not his forte. We are always short of money. I cannot think how it is!"

She knew but too well how it was. The ready money received for oats, barley, and young stock, went straight into the Major's yawning pockets, and then mysteriously evaporated! How could she divulge to her son that his step-father had lost seven hundred pounds at the Curragh, and nearly as much at Cork Park races; that his wine merchant and tailor were raving for their money; that the servants were owed a year's wages; that she blushed to meet the baker's wife, and was afraid to enter the post office.

"How is Denis getting on, mother?" asked George, after a pause.

"I really do not know," she replied with evident reluctance. "Dr. Moran thinks he has abilities; he is fond of surgery, and you know, ever since he was quite a boy, he has always killed our pigs; he says himself that his next examination is absurdly easy."

"I am glad to hear it."

"You see he has such high spirits, poor fellow," continued his doting parent, taking up arms for her darling, against something intangible in his elder brother's voice. "He is so young and spirited. It's hard to be tied down to books and loathsome dissecting-rooms, when he is such a splendid shot, and so fond of hunting and fishing. He is very sorry now, that he ever decided to be a doctor; he says he ought to have gone into the army like you."

"He can still be an army doctor."

"So he can," sighed Mrs. Malone, once more resuming her needle. "Well, we must think it over."

George leant his elbow on the mantel-piece, and looked at her attentively. How different from the golden-haired angel of his childhood. How aged and thin, and worn she had become during these last five years!

"Mother," he said abruptly, "you are looking ill and worried; what is the matter? Have you any trouble on your mind?"

"Yes, George, to tell the truth I have; but I am not going to share it with you. So don't ask me. You have been only too generous—the best of sons—and if I have seen but little of you of late, nor seemed a real mother to you, I have never forgotten you, day and night, and when I heard that you were so ill, I cannot tell you what I suffered, or describe my feelings."

(The Major's feelings were those of complacent anticipation; if George died unmarried, his income of five hundred a year lapsed to his mother for her life.)

"Are you quite sure that the sea voyage has set you up? And *tell* me, dear, do you wear flannel next to your skin?" gazing up into his face with an expression of intense anxiety.

"Do I look like an invalid?" he returned with an evasive smile. I am as right as a trivet now. I was well before we reached Suez. Never mind me, but tell me all about Denis," and leaning towards her, he said:

"Your trouble is about *him*, is it not?"

"George, you must be a wizard. How could you guess? Well, you are right; it *is* about him. His college expenses are frightful, and his tailor's bill is incredible."

"I should not have supposed that he spent much on his clothes," remarked his brother gravely.

"But he does, and there is a long account at his grocer's—he breakfasts in his rooms—for tea and sugar, and raisins, and candles—such *quantities* of candles, but he will study at night (miserable Mrs. Malone, for candles, read whisky, for sugar, porter, for tea, gin). "I really dare not show them to his father," and she put a ragged lace handkerchief to her eyes, and wept.

"Perhaps, mother, you had better show them to *me*," suggested George.

"No, no, you are far too liberal. You have little enough as it is," she sobbed. "I am past help," casting her thoughts over all their debts, their accumulating debts in Dublin, Ballingooole, and at the county bank. "You might as well try to bale the sea with a tea-spoon as to help *me*."

"But if I may not help my own mother, whom may I help?" he urged eagerly. "I have been living at a cheap little up country station, where I had no way of spending rupees, and I have a good balance at Cox's. I can let you have a cheque for three hundred pounds at once."

"Oh, George, I am ashamed to take it," she whimpered, drawing him towards her, and throwing her arms round his neck. "You make me feel

like a guilty woman; you make me feel like a thief."

"Mother, you must never say that to *me*. Besides, you forget that I brought you home no presents. I was too hurried to look for things in Bombay, and I am sure you can lay out the money far more sensibly than I should have done, in trashy curiosities."

(This three hundred pounds was part of a sum that he had set aside for his trip home; he had had visions of a couple of clever hunters, of renting a small shooting-box, of a round of the London theatres, and a trip to Paris and Nice.)

"Is it true that your Uncle Godfrey is going to make you his heir?" she asked, as she dried her eyes and brightened up a little; "I heard something about it from old Miss Holroyd."

"No, he offered me a large allowance if I would cut the Service and marry."

"And what did you say, George? I hope you promised to think it over."

"I thanked him, and declined. I have enough for myself. I have no idea of marrying, and I mean to stick to the Service, as long as it will stick to me."

"If you ever *do* marry, dear, I hope you will get a good wife. Marriage is a great lottery, and there are many blanks——"

One of these blanks now walked into the room in the shape of Major Malone, followed by a tray of light refreshments, also by Cuckoo, red-eyed, but tranquil.

George poured out a glass of wine, and carried it to his mother, whilst Cuckoo helped herself generously to macaroons, remarking, as she did so: "Denis says that sherry is *poison*—eighteen shillings a dozen—don't you touch it; it's only kept for visitors; we never have supper like this when

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we are alone. These are lovely macaroons," speaking with her mouth full. "Cleary, the grocer, grumbled about giving them; he is owed *such* a bill, and he says——"

"Cuckoo," roared her father, turning on her a countenance charged with fury, "I have told you once before to-night to hold your tongue. Upon my word, Lucy, I believe that girl is possessed of some devil. I shall pack her off to a reformatory one of these days, I swear I shall. As to Cleary, the grocer," now blustering and helping himself to a stiff tumbler of highly-coloured whisky and water, "he is uncommonly proud of my custom, and thankful to have it. It was my father who first set him going, and without the Malones of Bridgetstown he would be in a very poor way." (Thanks to the Malones of Bridgetstown, he *was* in a very poor way.)

The Major had a notion, that tradespeople actually considered his orders a high compliment, and fully equivalent to cash, and when he strutted into a shop, be it tailor's, saddler's, or grocer's, he selected largely of the best. He did not comprehend self-denial, nor why *he* should lack anything that was furnished to men of ten times his means. Yet when creditors timidly ventured to ask for their little account, he considered it a most impertinent liberty, as if they were begging for *his* money. He was not at all sensitive about debt; he owed bills for years to his wine merchant and tailor, and had not the most remote intention of paying them. Ready cash could be laid out so much more pleasantly and satisfactorily. Besides, when wine has been drunk, and coats worn threadbare, is it not a cruel hardship to have your immediate attention requested to a very stiff account?

Cuckoo took shelter behind the chair of her elder brother, and whispered to him, as she

munched her macaroons, that "if anyone ought to be sent to a reformatory, it was Denis; he was out now, smoking in the harness room, with Casey, the jockey, and Mooney, the sweep."

Soon after this refection the family retired to rest. George had the luxury of a fire in his room, and sat before it for a long time, buried in thought.

What a home this was! His mother a mere heart-broken household drudge; his sister a mischievous, razor-tongued little savage; his brother—he was beginning to fear that Denis, of whom his mother had written such glowing accounts, was neither more nor less than an idle scapegrace; and, as to Major Malone—he was Major Malone.

Before the mistress of the house removed her unwonted finery, she got an envelope and pencil, and hurriedly jotted down her most pressing debts. The butcher's bill was £209. Would £80 stop Mrs. Maccabe's mouth? The baker was owed £75, and one of Denis' most dangerous creditors was clamouring for a hundred "on the nail." There would be no margin for Cuckoo's new outfit, nor for the sealskin jacket for herself, at which George had hinted. This three hundred would be a mere drop in the ocean. George must write her a larger cheque. Yes! poor woman, her finer feelings were blunted by distressing and disgraceful shifts; the iron entered into her soul, when she evaded Miss Bolland, and cringed to Mrs. Maccabe—terrible Mrs. Maccabe! George was well off; he had no ties, and but few expenses; and, in spite of all her tears and deprecations, she was prepared to despoil her eldest born, to shield and succour Denis.

"Lucy," said the Major, looking through his dressing-room door, tie in hand, "do you think that fellow would back a bill for me. Eh! what? what?"

"No, indeed, Major, I am certain he would not," she returned indignantly.

"What have you got on that paper there? Eh, show."

"Bills; debts; we owe so much money that I am ashamed to walk through the town. Cleary, the grocer, sent up to-day, and, as to Mrs. Maccabe, I tremble when I see her."

"Pooh! So does everyone; you are not uncommon in that, the old termagant! I say, is that son of yours going to put his hand in his pocket? What's the use of a rich fellow like that, if he won't help his mother. Eh! what? what?"

"He is not rich, far from it; he believes that I have my jointure of four hundred a year; he does not know that I sold my life interest in it years ago."

"I hope you impressed upon him that times were bad; I will go bail you cried; it's about the only thing you are good at," he concluded with a savage sneer.

"He has promised me a cheque for three hundred pounds," said Mrs. Malone coldly.

"By Jove! then I will go halves!"

"No, indeed, it's little, it's not half enough. Do you know that we owe Kane, the baker, seventy-five pounds, and he is a poor man too."

"Bosh! I'm a poor man; let these cormorants wait. They *must*; debts of honour come first, and I owe Dunne, of Jockey Hall, a hundred pounds, which will have to be paid at once."

"A bet?"

"Yes, a bet," he answered, with a defiant scowl.

"Tom Malone," she said, tearing the envelope slowly as she spoke, "do you ever think what my life is? Do you know how often I wish I were dead? Do you suppose, if George Holroyd had lived, that I would be the poor, mean, unhappy wretch that I am?"

"There, don't give me any more of that sort of stuff; you know the old proverb. Eh! what? Never marry a widow, unless her first husband was *hanged*. I have no doubt that if George the First, was the cool-headed fastidious, fine gentleman his son is, he would have been devilish sick of you long ago. Mind one thing, I must have that hundred pounds this week; that chap is well off, times are hard. Why, I am actually smoking a pipe, and drinking cheap Scotch whisky! You are his mother, you have a strong claim on him. So don't be afraid of opening your mouth." And with this injunction, he entered his dressing-room and shut the door.

One scene more before the night closes. Let us take a peep at Belle Redmond, as she sits over her bedroom fire, with a small looking glass in her hand, carefully examining first her teeth, then her eyelashes. She has been building fine castles in the air, ever since Juggy, at the lodge, announced that "a strange gentleman, in a grey ulster, had passed on a hack car, about six o'clock."

"He won't come and call to-morrow," said Belle to herself. "No, but after to-morrow we must always have a good fire in the drawing-room, and I shall wear my brown dress, and see that Eliza is ready to answer the door. Betty must make a cake. Oh, dear, I hope he will be better than that oaf, Denis! And have some life and go in him, for I shall do my best to marry him, no matter how hideous he is. Another winter here would finish me. I should certainly be found hanging from the baluster one fine morning. How Eliza would scream! But she would not cut me down. No! she hates me," and she smiled at her reflection in the mirror. "Yes," she said, with a nod to herself, "I am as handsome and as irresistible as ever. To this young Holroyd, fresh from

dowdy, withered women in India, I shall seem divine."

Then she laid aside her mirror, and, resting her chin on her hand, gazed into the fire, with an expression of unusual contentment in her dissatisfied dark eyes. Here is an opportunity to sketch Belle's portrait, as she sits thus staring meditatively into the red turf sods. She inherits her dark eyes, her excitable disposition, and her volcanic spirit, from her grandmother, a French Canadian; and ever since she was a pretty and precocious—though somewhat sallow—infant, she has absolutely ruled her mother, who never attempted to contradict her wishes, nor to restrain her unusually fiery temper. What was amusing petulance at three years of age, was ungovernable passion at—well—twenty-nine. For each disastrous love affair, or social disappointment, had served to increase the force of her most prominent characteristic. She made no effort to control her furies before inferiors, or in the bosom of her family, for she had an idea that, as she was beautiful, she was absolved from being good! Fortunately these domestic tornadoes were of short duration, and, whilst the storm raged (and Belle raved, and stamped, and screamed) all the household bent before it, as reeds in a strong gale. When it passed over, the frantic mad woman of ten minutes previously, having gained her end, was a kissing, weeping, coaxing slave. Mrs. Redmond spoke of these visitations as "attacks on the nerves" but the servants gave them a totally different interpretation. Belle's scenes, were chiefly enacted for the benefit of the home circle; but now and then there had been disagreeable outbreaks in shops, in boarding-houses, and, above all, at the rehearsals of private theatricals, after which, it had been the painful office of her miserable mother to offer abject apologies, to eat humble pie

and to fly the neighbourhood. Belle was undoubtedly out of her element at Noone, a veritable swan upon a turnpike road. She danced admirably, sang delightful little French songs, and acted with such grace and *verve* and real dramatic feeling, that spiteful people hinted that she was a professional, whose temper had been the bane of her engagements. But who wanted piquant chansons, or inimitable acting, in dreary Ballingoolie? They would have been respectively stigmatised as French trash and tomfoolery; Belle pined for her former nomadic existence, and detested her present respectable anchorage. She loved the town and the gay haunts of fashion; loathed the country, and had a true French woman's abhorrence of wet fields, muddy roads, strong boots and draggled petticoats. Although she only understood house-keeping from a lady lodger's point of view, to wit, hashes, cold mutton, and poached eggs, she nevertheless eagerly seized the reins of government on her arrival at Noone. Her restless spirit and maddening tongue (and, they said, mean ways) soon drove the old servants wild—servants accustomed to unlimited meat, unlimited tea, and unlimited leisure.

There was one tremendous scene of powerful domestic interest, and they all gave warning, and departed "*en masse*." After this catastrophe, the keys were made over to Betty, who established a new régime—and a great calm. Belle was unspeakably miserable; she had nothing to do; no congenial society; nowhere to display her gay new hats. Far be it from *her*, to run after beagles, to gather blackberries, or to visit stupid, narrow-minded old ladies. She spent as much time from home as possible, and, when at Noone, lay novel reading in bed, or prowled restlessly from room to room, from window to window, and filled in the

weary hours by combing her poodle, writing long letters, and reorganising her wardrobe. Sometimes, in fine weather, she dressed herself carefully, arrayed "Mossoo," in a pink ribbon, and strolled along a road that led to an—alas!—distant garrison town, on the meagre chance of meeting an officer who might drift thus far to shoot or fish. If she encountered one or two in a sporting dog-cart, and if they had stared very hard at the pretty, smartly dressed girl, and her well trimmed companion, Belle's mission was accomplished; she was happy for *that* day.

* * * * *

The morning after George Holroyd's arrival, Mrs. Malone had a tearful and pathetic conversation with her son; and, as she sauntered, arm in arm with him, round the wintry garden, she opened her mouth to such an extent, that he was compelled to make his headquarters at Bridgetstown. There would be no spare cash for clever hunters, a trip abroad, or even a little mixed shooting. Surely Belle Redmond's star was in the ascendant.

CHAPTER V.

FOXY JOE.

"I know a trick worth two of that."

—HENRY IV.

"JOEY, Joey, Foxy Joe, I say, hold hard."

Thus challenged by Denis Malone, in a ringing brogue, an elderly dwarf, who had been shuffling along a boreen, halted and looked sharply about him. It was at the close of a dull afternoon; there was more than a hint of frost in the air, and over the marshy lands, at either side of the lane, a thin white mist was rising. To the left, Denis and his step-brother, with guns on their shoulders, were

struggling across a bit of bog—towards where Joey stood awaiting them. Joey is possibly fifty years of age, and not more than four feet in height. He has a long body, and very short legs; nevertheless, he wears the clothes of a full grown man; his frieze coat almost sweeps the ground; his waistcoat reaches half way to his boots, and his trousers are doubled back to his knees, and there pinned; long, reddish elf locks fall over his collar, and his little grey eyes look out somewhat vacantly from a pent-house of bushy red brows. However, if not very bright—although Joey's enemies declare that he is more of a knave than a fool—at any rate he has wit enough for his business; he is messenger and postman to the neighbourhood, and wears a leather bag, slung over his shoulder, as an insignia of his profession. In one hand he carries a stout blackthorn, and in the other a plump woodcock. A minute later, George Holroyd was within easy hail, coming over the wet tussocks with long strides; these long strides suddenly increased to a rapid run, for a deep, wet gripe, with treacherous sides of thick, withered grass, lay between him and Joey. "You'll never do it, Captain darlin'," screamed the dwarf, raising his stick. "It's eighteen foot if it's——" Before another word left his lips, "Captain darlin'" stood in the boreen beside him.

"Oh, begorra thin, well lepped! You're as souple as Pat Kearney's heifer; he can't keep her out of the potato garden, at no price. Is she loaded, Captain?" pointing to the gun. (N.B., the Irish peasant believes every young officer to be a captain at the very least.)

"To be sure, she is."

"An supposin' she went off and shot me?"

"No fear of that, Joey," remarked Denis, who had joined them. "A mannikin like you would

be as hard to hit as a jack snipe, and they are the very devil. We saw nothing else to-day."

"Well, well; so ye had poor sport, had ye? It's a bad day for fowling; what ails the red terrier, Crab?"

"I peppered him with No. 9 shot, and I want you to carry him home."

"Is it Crab?" he returned, in a tone of peevish incredulity. "Faix, Mr. Denis, a lighter job would answer me better! I'm sorry you did not shoot him all out, when ye went about it! I've a print of his teeth in the calf of me leg yet. Look at him now, rowling the white of his eye on me, bad cess to him."

"Well, then, carry my gun; that won't bite you."

"Be gor! I would not touch a shootin' iron for the Pope himself—may be she'd go off in spite of me."

"What good are you, then?" exclaimed Denis, angrily. "Afraid of a dog; afraid of a gun; I'll go bail you would not be so nervous if you were asked to carry a quart bottle of whisky."

"Begorra, yer honour, ye have only to *thry* me! I've just been over at Mr. Blake's. Now there's a man for ye! He called me in, and gave me a glass of spirits strong enough to take the paint off a hall door. Be gor," his little eyes glistening at the recollection, "to this minute itself, I'm aware of a torch-light procession going down me throat."

"And what have you got there?" continued Denis imperiously.

"Oh, a terrible fine young woodcock Mr. Blake is sending Mrs. Redmond."

"Show it here."

Joey tendered it proudly.

"It's a fine, heavy bird," said Denis, balancing it critically on the palm of his hand. "And it's a mortal sin to give it to an old woman that does not know goose from grouse. Where was it shot?"

"By Bresna Wood, I'm thinking—they are in now, but it's over early to be shooting them yet."

Meanwhile Denis, with the skill of a conjurer, had thrust his hand into his lean game bag, and dexterously substituted the noble woodcock for a miserable jack snipe, which, as all the world knows, strongly resembles the former in everything but size. "Well, Joey, here you are!" handing him the snipe with imperturbable countenance.

"What!" screamed Joey, surveying it with open-mouthed horror. "What devil's trick are you up to now, Mr. Denis? Arrah!" snatching at it passionately. "Give it back to me here, before you make a *wran* of it." It was evident that Joey believed that Denis had wrought a spell on the bird, and might possibly develop it so far, as to reduce the woodcock to nothing at all.

"What's come over it?" he whimpered, turning it about in great perplexity. "What have ye done to it, at all, at all? Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, so ye ought; it's not the weight of a robin red-breast."

"Then give it to me again, and I'll blow on it, and make it the size of a cock turkey."

"In troth, and I won't. I know yer *too* well. Here our roads part," opening a gate that led towards Noone, "and I'll be for wishing ye good evening, gentlemen; *gentleman*, I mane," he muttered to himself as he shambled off, with the jack in his hand. "Sure all the world knows there's only *wan* in it."

Denis put down Crab; leant his gun against the gate, and gave vent to a loud ironical view halloo. "Gone away—gone away—gone away!"

An unpleasant reference to Joey's nickname which Joey deeply resented. He turned back for a moment and shook his stick furiously at Denis, saying: "Never fear, me fine fellow, but I'll have it in for ye *yet*," and then plodded on,

"How that chap does hate me!" remarked Denis complacently, as he shouldered his gun. "I'd like to wring his neck. He is the spy and informer of the whole country."

"I say, though! that's rather hard lines about the bird," expostulated his brother, who had lagged behind, to pick up Crab. "What will Mrs. Redmond think, when she receives a surprisingly minute jack snipe, with Mr. Blake's compliments?"

"Oh! I'll take down the woodcock myself this evening, and kill two birds with one stone, for I shall see Betty—not to speak of Belle, a belle that no one seems disposed to ring, in spite of her fine eyes, smart frocks, and fascinating manners."

"Talking of manners," said his brother, "I wish Cuckoo could be sent to school."

"You may well say so! she's an awful brat. The mother spoils her and gives her her head entirely."

"She ought to be sent to some good, strict establishment without delay."

"She ought," assented Denis; "many things *ought* to be done, if the coin were forthcoming. For instance, I ought to have been put into the Service—a cavalry regiment for choice—an only son and heir to a property, instead of being a pill!"

"How soon will you take your degree?"

"I don't know. I hate the whole thing; sometimes I think I'll enlist."

"If I were you, I would stick to my profession, it's a very good one, and now you are four and twenty, Denis, it's time you began to put your hand to the plough."

"I suppose the Mater has been asking you to lecture me, eh?" said Denis in a surly voice.

"No, indeed, she has not. She has the greatest faith in you, Denis. I am only speaking off my own bat."

"Then, in that case, please keep your bat out of

my affairs. I don't meddle with you, do I?" he enquired savagely. "You have never done anything for *me* that I know of, and have no right to offer your opinion and advice. Advice is cheap."

"All the same, I intend to tell you that I am very sorry to see you idling about at home, instead of making a start, and Cuckoo growing up without any education at all," returned his brother firmly.

"Oh, she is not as bad as you think," said Denis in a milder key. It would not suit him to have a row with George. "She does lessons three times a week with Betty Redmond; she and Betty are tremendous pals—and talk of an angel, here she comes!"

At this moment, a roomy bath-chair, containing a substantial old lady, appeared looming down the road. At first it seemed to be rolling along of its own accord, but, on nearer inspection, a black hat was visible (though almost concealed Mrs. Redmond's bonnet, and enormous yell boa). A slender young girl was the motive power, and pushing behind with might and main.

It was getting dark, and faces were not seen very distinctly, but when Mrs. Redmond came near the two sportsmen, she imperatively called out, "Stop," and waved Denis towards her, with her gigantic fur muff.

"I've just been up to Bridgetstown, but I did not see your mother. They *said* she was out; however, I went in and sat down, to give Betty a rest. Cuckoo entertained us about—Ah, I suppose *this* is your brother; it is so dark, Mr. Holroyd, that I am sorry I cannot see you; but I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

Mr. Holroyd muttered indistinctly, and removed his cap.

"I am afraid you will find it frightfully dull here,

and so different to military life ! I am devoted to the army, so is my daughter Belle. We have many friends in the Service. I hope we shall see a great deal of you ; whenever you are feeling at all bored, mind you come and look us up ! ”

Mr. Holroyd declared that he would be charmed to accept Mrs. Redmond's invitation, but that he was sure he would not be at all bored ; he liked the country, and hoped to have some hunting.

Hitherto no one had noticed the girl behind the chair. The outline of her features was indistinguishable ; nevertheless, George had compassion on her, and said :

“ Is this not rather heavy work ; the roads are so muddy ? ”

“ Not at all ! Not at all ! ” rejoined Mrs. Redmond hastily. “ It's all down-hill going home, and exercise is capital for young people, especially this kind of exercise, for it brings all the muscles into play, legs and arms alike. ”

“ But surely it is rather a long distance for one young lady, ” expostulated George.

“ You ought to have Miss Redmond posted somewhere on the road as second horse—lay a dâk as they call it in India, ” suggested Denis facetiously.

“ Pooh ! it's only a mile from gate to gate. Belle would be only too delighted to take her turn, but she is such a little delicate darling, the slightest physical exertion knocks her up at once. For a strong girl it is nothing. Why, at Folkestone, I used to keep a bath-chair man for three hours at a stretch, and Betty has had a long rest. ”

“ Nevertheless, I hope you will accept me as her substitute, and permit me to convey you home, ” said George politely.

“ Oh, well really, Mr. Holroyd, ” exclaimed the old lady (divided between delight at the offer, and

apprehension as to the style of raiment in which her dear Belle might be discovered), "I would not think of it; no, not on any account."

"Oh! out you must. I assure you I will take no refusal. I never take a refusal" (this was an excellent trait thought the old lady), as he placed his hand on the back of the chair.

"Here, Denis, you can carry my gun, and Crab will have to walk; he is more frightened than hurt;" and before Mrs. Redmond could expostulate, he was rolling her rapidly homewards.

"Well, this *is* kind," she said. "What a delightful change from Betty; she does jerk so, and can scarcely get me on at all. I'm sure it is all knack."

"Knack, indeed," thought her charioteer. "By Jove! this old woman weighs fifteen stone, and the chair as much as a cab; unfortunate girl, how her arms must ache."

Meanwhile the unfortunate girl, and Denis, lingered behind, and Denis made over the woodcock, with a short sketch of its history, and roars of laughter.

"And how do you like *him*?" enquired Betty, looking after the bath-chair. "Is he the stuck-up beast you expected?"

"No, I cannot say that he is stuck up, but he is rather superfine for Bridgetstown; he wears silk socks of an evening, flies to open the door for the mater, and calls the governor 'Sir.'"

"You must be quite startled at such queer ways," returned the girl, with an irony that was completely lost on her listener. "Anything else?" she asked blandly.

"He is shocked at Cuckoo, and no wonder, and he has been trying to lecture *me*."

"And no wonder," she echoed expressively.

"Now, Betty!"

"Pray, what was the text of his lecture?"

"Hanging about at home, and you know *who* is to blame for that," and he tried to look sentimental, as he peered into her face.

"Denis, don't be ridiculous! you are like a dying duck in a thunderstorm. I know very well who is to blame for your idleness; no less a person than yourself: you loaf about the country with a gun or a rod, when you ought to be earning your living, or learning to earn your living, like another young man. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, I know *I* am ashamed for you."

"I've a good mind to enlist!" he exclaimed in a tone of gloomy resolution.

"Well, anything is better than idleness," returned Betty cheerfully. "I would far rather see you a steady private soldier, than a good-for-nothing private gentleman."

"There's no one, not even my mother, who would dare to speak to me as you do, Betty Redmond."

"Your mother, poor soul! I suppose not, but as to other people, it's not that they don't dare—they don't *care*! Do you imagine that anyone is afraid of such an insignificant helpless idler as Denis Malone?"

"Betty, you *have* a tongue, and no one suspects it but me!" cried Denis, angrily.

"Well, I am very glad that it is sharp enough to penetrate your rhinoceros skin. I hope you will take what it says to heart. Now, I must fly. They are nearly out of sight." And with a gesture of farewell, she ran after the bath-chair.

Mrs. Redmond talked incessantly as she was trundled along. She discoursed of the dreariness of the country, of her military friends, of her limited means, and of Belle, her beautiful Belle!

Utterly lost in this wilderness—a veritable pearl among swine—Belle the ornament of countless balls, the admired of all, the cynosure of even royal eyes, and yet, in spite of her dull life at Noone, she was so gay, so contented, the very light of the house!

This was satisfactory information, for when they arrived at the hall door, the whole mansion was in outer darkness. Belle was sitting in the study, with a small French poodle in her lap, and three fox terriers stretched out before the fire, in various attitudes of luxurious repose. These latter animals had been the property of the late master of Noone, and actually enjoyed a legacy of five pounds each per annum, for the term of their natural lives—and of course it was Mrs. Redmond's interest to prolong their days, though she did not care for dogs. Their names were respectively "Brown," "Jones," and "Robinson," and they had each their distinctive characteristics.

"Brown" was stout, elderly, and self-conscious; he liked his comforts, such as fire, a regular walk, and a good and punctual dinner. He was a *bon vivant* and did not eat fat or vegetables—an habituè of the kitchen—and slept with the cook.

"Robinson" was a young and very handsome animal, who was fond of admiration, and ladies, and tea; was particular about his appearance, and had quite a fund of small affectations; he was a general favourite—even Mrs. Redmond was proud of "Robinson."

"Jones" was also young and handsome—white body, black and tan head—a mighty hunter, whose thoughts were centred on sport, and who cared not a straw for the cook—indeed his whole heart was given to Betty. He led a joyous, but by no means innocent, life, in the woods, and would sit over a rabbit hole for hours, and, when he was in full

chase of poor bunny, his delighted barks made the plantations to ring. Many a time, he would return late at night, and lay his prey at Betty's feet, gobble down his dinner, stretch his tired, muddy body before the fire, and there hunt in dreams!

On this particular evening, all the dogs were at home, "laid out," so to speak, on the hearth-rug, whilst Belle nursed "Mossoo" and devoured a battered novel, by the light of a cheap candle.

"Mossoo," a pampered, shivering, discontented little beast, was adored by his mistress—in fact, she belonged to him—not he to her! He was washed, trimmed, be-ribboned and caressed, fed on cream and chicken, and dainty dinners, with plenty of gravy. He had no sporting instincts, he disliked mice, was desperately afraid of cats and of wetting his feet, and the other dogs hated him, as boys in a family invariably hate the pet, the coward, and the sneak. He was accomplished too, degradingly accomplished; and as he went through his antics and stood upon his head, "Brown," "Jones," and "Robinson" sat and stared at him with grave and scornful faces, and seemed to glance at one another as much as to say: "Did you *ever* see such a fool?"

However, as long as "Mossoo" had fresh cream and a soft pillow, and his mistress's applause and devotion, he was above the opinion of his fellows.

Suddenly there was an unusual sound, a strange voice in the hall; the dogs leapt to their feet, and tore out of the room, one yelping, skelping whirlwind. If Belle had been a man, she would have used strong language as she capsized "Mossoo," laid down her book, and strained her ears to catch a sound above that maddening din.

Yes! a man's voice, and then her mother's.

"Oh, you must come in, you really must! and

have a glass of our celebrated rhubarb wine," (celebrated indeed !)

Belle jumped up. She was in a shabby, old, red tea-gown; her hair resembled a bottle brush. With great presence of mind she blew out the candle, pushed one or two chairs into their places, flung herself into a luxuriant seat, rather out of the fire-light, and feigned sleep.

"If mother orders the lamp," she said to herself, "I am lost."

But luckily her astute old mother, grasped the situation, and when, ten minutes later, George Holroyd took leave, he carried away with him the memories of a dim room, a pair of magnificent dark eyes, a ditto of restless, small, white hands, and a bewitching smile. It is not certain, that he had not left a minute portion of his heart behind him. At any rate he had promised to return the following day, and bring his music, all his songs, and especially his *duets*. His late arrival at home was the subject of much graceful badinage on the part of his brother and sister.

"Did you see Belle, and was she dressed?" enquired the latter, capering round him.

"Of course she was dressed, you little savage."

"I am surprised to hear it. How I wish you had caught her in her old, red dressing-gown."

"Was the chair heavy?" enquired Denis.

"Weighs a ton; the old lady should really charter a pony or a donkey."

"She had a fine donkey to-day and that was yourself," returned Denis with a grin. "Fancy tooling old Mother Redmond home! Upon my word, I did not think you were so soft. Eh! what?"

DANGEROUS.

CHAPTER VI.

DANGEROUS.

“ ‘ Will you walk into my parlour ?
Said the spider to the fly.”

HER eldest son's generous cheque had lifted a heavy load of care from Mrs. Malone's bowed shoulders. She had caulked and repaired her sinking credit, with various gratifying sums "on account," and although the Major bullied her out of twenty pounds, and Denis blarneyed away twenty more, yet she contrived to pay the most pressing village bills and the servants' wages, and to purchase some much-needed garments for Cuckoo and herself. In a new bonnet and gown, she was a comparatively happy woman, when she carried her soldier son round to call on the neighbourhood—on the Mahons of the Glen, the Lynches of Newton-Girly, the Moores of Roskeen, Miss Dopping and the Finnys. Mrs. Finny—who was as much too sweet as her daughter was the reverse—clasped her bony hands, ecstatically, in Mrs. Malone's face, as she welcomed her, and brought a tinge of red into George Holroyd's tanned cheek, by saying: "So *good* of you, my dear, kind friend, to bring your handsome son to see us."

Mrs. Malone's handsome son, needed no introduction to Noone, and was perfectly competent to find his way there alone! He had received several cups of tea from the fair hands of Belle—little did he suspect the claws that were at the end of those soft, white fingers—how should he? Belle was on her best, her very best behaviour—and he had lunched there once, in company with Denis, on rabbit pie, bottled gooseberries, and rhubarb wine

—yet lived to tell the tale! but on no occasion had he come across the girl who had wheeled the bath-chair. Nor, to be perfectly frank, did he miss her.

After a long morning's tramp over bogs and marshes, the dark November afternoons were somewhat difficult to dispose of (a late dinner has its drawbacks), and it was not altogether unpleasant to stroll across to Noone, and sit over its drawing-room fire, with a brilliant companion, who always remembered that he took no sugar, and very little cream; sang tender love songs, and sparkling French chansons, with considerable expression; told amusing anecdotes with much vivacity and gesticulation, and enrolled him in a kind of delightful, confidential, companionship.

They knew so many mutual military acquaintances, and military stations, and both were aliens to this monotonous rural existence. Belle was vivacious in appreciative company, related malicious tales of her neighbours, flattered him discreetly about his singing and shooting, and told him, with a sigh, that he reminded her so forcibly of a very great friend of hers, who, she subsequently let fall, was as handsome as a god!—and yet people said that Belle was not clever and that Betty had ten times her brains. Whilst this merry young couple laughed and talked and sang, Mrs. Redmond dozed over her knitting, or woke up with a start, to gaze at the animated faces at the tea table, and to watch George Holroyd furtively, with a cunning, predatory glance out of her little yellowish eyes. Would anything come of *this*? she wondered. She was desperately anxious about her daughter's future. At her death Noone reverted to another branch of the family, and her beautiful, helpless, hot-tempered Belle, would be left to face the world with a very scanty income. Her own life, she knew, could not be prolonged. She was in the

deadly grip of a fatal malady, and if she could only see Belle well married, she would die happy and with her mind at rest, but Belle was "getting on," and was, alas! still Miss Redmond. And she bent all her energies to screwing and scraping every spare halfpenny, in order to leave her daughter a better provision when she herself had passed away. Now and then, she had reluctantly fitted her out for a short campaign in England, for a tour of what proved to be barren visits, remaining herself at Noone, to count the potatoes and sods of turf, and to subsist on rabbits and herrings. The mere act of putting by one sovereign after another, soon became her keenest pleasure, and the enjoyment grew stronger the more it was indulged in, though she always assured herself that this feverish gathering in of shillings and pound notes, had nothing to do with a love of money, but solely with her love of Belle! Belle herself had no anxieties about her future. She had made up her mind to marry George Holroyd and accompany him to India—her promised land. She was a young woman of some decision where her own interests were concerned, and possessed a considerable fund of tenacity—in spite of which several of her admirers had detached themselves, and escaped ;—and, although she was by no means in love with her new acquaintance, she was enamoured of his profession and his prospects, and her restless spirit yearned for the perpetual changes of scene insured to an officer's wife. Visions of gay cantonments, and still gayer hill stations, rose before her mental eye—visions in which she saw herself living in a whirl of balls, theatricals, and picnics, the queen of society, the best-looking, best dressed, and most admired of her sex ; with legions of generals, aide-de-camps, yea, and commissioners, figuratively, at her feet. With each visit George paid, these

dreams assumed more real and brilliant hues. Woe, woe, be to the hand that would dispel them, and condemn her to damp dreary Noone, and the society of the Finnys, and Malones, for life—a life that to Belle, with her intense vitality, and quenchless craving for excitement, would be simply a living death!

George Holroyd was really quite amazed to find what rapid strides he had made in intimacy with the Redmonds. We know how easily the great Leviathan may be led, when once a hook is in his nose! and how simple it is for any idle young man to become entangled in the web of a pretty and experienced flirt. He began to feel almost apologetic and uncomfortable, when his mother regularly enquired at dinner “where he had been?”

And he replied as punctually: “Over to Noone,” or “I just looked in at Noone,” “I had tea at Noone.”

Cuckoo’s ill-bred titter, and Denis’s wink, were not lost upon him, much less the Major’s ponderous chaff, and constant regret that “he was not a young man, for Belle Redmond’s sake.” Belle was a pleasant companion for an hour or so, but George was not thinking of her as a companion for life.

He had discovered that she was a young lady that one came to the end of very soon. She was smart, sparkling and pretty; her animated gestures, and the playful little stamp of her foot, were all very taking in their way; but she was shallow, restless, and spiteful, and had a singularly foolish laugh. True that to him, she was undeniably sweet—sweet as Turkish delight—but then, with most people, a little of that cloying dainty goes a long way.

In his guilty heart, this miserable young man knew that he was daily expected to tea at Noone; that he already had his own particular chair, and

tea cup, and that he had given Belle a quantity of new songs, a belt of his regimental colours, and his photograph in two positions; but surely, he would argue with himself, she was a sensible girl, and too well accustomed to society and the ways of the world, to suppose that these were more than the most ordinary attentions, and, then, Mrs. Redmond had been very civil to *him*, and given him "carte blanche" to come and shoot rabbits whenever he pleased. Crafty old person! She sold the rabbits in the town for seven pence a piece, or hung them in the larder, and saved her butcher's bill.

To tell the truth, she and Mrs. Maccabe, the butcher's relict and successor in the business, were not on very friendly terms. If the Malones' bills were alarmingly long, Mrs. Redmond's were pitifully small.

"A pound and a half of neck chops, is it ma'am?" Mrs. Maccabe would scream. "No, ma'am, *not* to-day; you've had chops for the last three months. I suppose ye think the shape is made of chops, but let me inform you, ma'am, that you are under a mistake. Shape has legs and loins, and fore-quarters; you can take one of them, or go without."

And then Mrs. Maccabe, a powerful, formidable matron, in a large black bonnet, would seize an ox tail, kept for the purpose, and lay about her vigorously among the listening, sniggering, street urchins, whilst Mrs. Redmond would stalk back majestically to her bath-chair—and subsequently send a pencilled order for a sheep's head. Mrs. Maccabe was an authority in the town; even her grown-up married sons quailed before her tongue and her ox tail, and Maria Finny (herself a fearless speaker) stood in respectful awe of the butcher's widow.

"One day," to quote that championess, who

related the story with virtuous complacency, "she made a holy show of Miss Finny before the whole street." Maria, on frugal thoughts intent, had stepped in to remonstrate about a bit of gristle which she produced carefully wrapped in paper. "Av course, I know that to please *some* people bastes must be made without skin, and sinews, and bone. Weigh it Sam!" shouted Mrs. Maccabe to her son. "*One* ounce. Cut Miss Maria an ounce of mate!"

"There Miss," solemnly presenting it in paper, "I daresay it will serve you for a dinner."

Maria flung the packet into the middle of the street, and followed it in a fury, whilst her opponent placed her hands upon her fat sides and shook with wheezy laughter.

The widow had her good points, of course, or she would have had but few customers, on whom to sharpen her terrible tongue. Indeed her poorer patrons did not care a straw for her abuse, and paid her honestly in her own coin, with ruthless and ready answers. She was most charitable in secret, and many a fine chop and steak, and many a strong bowl of broth, was given away *quite* on the sly. She was long suffering to those who were really badly off, a devout Catholic, and a liberal contributor to her own Church: besides this, her meat was prime—unsurpassed in the whole province—and no better judge of a beast, ever stood in a fair than Bridget Maccabe. As the poor innocent animals passed unconsciously before her, she could tell to a pound, how they would cut up! Her purchases were young, healthy, and well-fed; she scorned to deal in tough, old, milch cows, and skinny strippers, and boasted that no second-class joint, ever hung beneath the sign of "B. Maccabe and Sons."

During the days in which George Holroyd had

developed so brisk an acquaintance with Noone, he had never once come across Betty Redmond. She was not kept out of his way in the upper or lower regions (as might be suspected), in case her claims to attention should clash with those of her cousin. Oh dear, no! Belle had no sincerer admirer. Betty was her willing drudge: she sewed for her, brought her breakfast in bed, and ran her errands with alacrity. Belle accepting these services with smiling thanks, and honeyed speeches. Her cheap fascinations secured for her, a devoted attendant, and saved her a lady's-maid.

Betty, who had known Ballingooole, and everyone in the neighbourhood, all her life, was quite at home in comparison with Mrs. Redmond and her daughter. She spent her holidays there, and looked forward to her visits to Noone, as if she were going direct to an earthly paradise. She loved the country, whether in summer or winter. She loved old "Playboy," the bay hunter who had taught her to ride, and now lay buried at the end of the orchard. She was fond of the dogs, the cart horses, the very cows.

She was also fond, in a way, of old Uncle Brian, with his goggle eyes, red face, and loud voice, but here her love was somewhat tempered by fear. He set her on horseback when she was seven years old, and flogged old "Playboy," over big fences, in order to teach her to ride like an Irish woman, and he laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, when the chestnut filly kicked her off in the lawn, and went away with the best half of her habit. He took her out with him, when he went snipe shooting, to make her active and hardy; nor dare she flinch, before the deepest, blackest bog-drain, and he taught her to play backgammon and cribbage, and swore at her roundly, if she made a mistake. "To be afraid of

nothing, to speak the truth, and to pull up her stockings," were the injunctions which he enforced on his grand-niece. He left other matters to her instructors at the English school.

When Betty was sixteen, her Uncle Brian died quite suddenly of apoplexy, said to have been induced by a fit of furious passion, and when she returned to Noone, her heart sank within her, for a new mistress was coming, and she expected great changes. The new mistress was an Englishwoman, with a pretty daughter, and both were total strangers to Ballingooole and Betty.

Betty went mournfully round the place in her new black dress, accompanied by her intimate friends, "Brown," "Jones," and "Robinson." There had been an auction of all the stock and out-door effects; the yard was full of straw, and bits of boxes and newspapers; the stables, byre, and coach house were empty; the house itself, how dreary and forlorn; at every turn she missed old Uncle Brian, with his loud voice and tapping stick, and was very miserable indeed, till Miss Dopping came that afternoon, and carried her away to her own home, and subsequently to visit the Moores of Roskeen.

A week or two later, Mrs. Redmond arrived, inquisitive, astute, agreeable—prepared to tolerate Betty, and to tolerate the dogs—and to make a little money out of both!

But Betty was a delightful surprise; a bright, clever, active girl, full of good humour and energy, who knew the ways of the place, and was most useful in the house, and took to Belle—and, what was more important, Belle took to her—immediately.

Far from being set on one side, Betty was an influential personage, and her aunt's domestic viceroy and right hand. She had not been visible at the tea-table, simply because she never partook

of afternoon tea. Her Uncle Brian had called it a "kitchen-maid's custom," and she liked being out of doors until it was almost dark. At present she spent all her afternoons with Miss Dopping, who had been laid up with a bad cold ever since her visit to Noone, and Mrs. Redmond gladly spared her niece, for two reasons; firstly, because she did not want her; secondly, because she had her weather-eye fixed on Miss Dopping's money bags. The old lady was fond of Betty, was as wealthy as she was eccentric, and had no near kin. If Betty became a rich heiress, it would be a capital thing for Belle!

CHAPTER VII.

ONLY JONES.

"Some griefs are med'cinable."

—CYMBELINE.

GEORGE HOLROYD had fain to be content with the Ballingoolle Harriers, instead of the Ward-Union and Meath hounds; his poverty but not his will consented to this pitiable change. However, even Harriers must be followed on horseback, and up to the present, although the Major had been making constant enquiries among his own immediate connections, and many sporting friends, no suitable steed was secured. A large number of the blind, the maimed, the halt had been forthcoming, had been submitted for inspection, each and all a dead bargain, each sold as a personal favour to George, and for *no* fault, so the Major expressively stated upon what he was pleased to call "his sacred word of honour." George, who rode well, and recognised a decent horse when he saw it, at last grew tired of this farce, and said:

"I always thought that Ireland was the country for good horses. Where are they? I never saw

such a set of old screws—that one,” pointing to a discarded charger, “is like an old hair trunk, and has not a tooth in his head. My bump of veneration would forbid my getting on his back.”

“If you will go to a couple of hundred guineas,” said the Major (who loved not his step-son), “I’ll engage to get you a flyer—a chaser.”

“Thanks—but sixty is my limit, and as I am a light-weight I ought to be able to pick up something that will carry me for a couple of months.”

“There was that bay horse of Cooney’s—he is cheap enough! You tried him one day with the Harriers.”

“Yes, but I don’t care about an animal that expects you to carry his head home, after a very mild day’s sport.”

“Well, I believe I know of one, but he is a good way off, that won’t ask you to carry *his* head, but that takes it and mostly keeps it. May-be, he will please you,” said the Major huffily; “he belongs to a tenant of me cousin’s Mick Malone.”

While this independent animal was being looked up, George passed his time in shooting snipe, sunning himself in Miss Redmond’s smiles, and thinning her mother’s rabbits. One day, as he was tramping through the wet woods, accompanied by “lodge” Pat, laden with dead bunnies, he noticed through a glade, what looked like a black figure—the figure of a woman. As any figure was an unusual sight in the upper plantations, he halted, stared, and finally advanced towards her—a girl in an old waterproof and black felt hat, with masses of loose brown hair, kneeling on the damp moss, and occasionally laying her head on the ground! “An escaped lunatic!” Also two very anxious fox terriers sniffing and yelping and running circles round her.

“It’s Miss Betty,” ejaculated Pat, and the sound of his voice made her spring to her feet, and confront them.

It was Miss Betty, the bath-chair girl ; and how plain she was ! Her hair was tumbling over her shoulders ; her face was deadly white ; her eyes dim and watery with crying ; her nose, the colour of a ripe tomato ; an unbecoming old hat ; a raw November day—of a truth, Betty Redmond had never looked worse !

"Can I be of any assistance ? Is anything the matter ?" enquired George politely, as he doffed his deerstalker.

"Yes, of course there is !" she gasped out hysterically. "It's *Jones* ! He has been in a rabbit-hole since yesterday."

Mr. Holroyd had never been formally introduced to the dogs ; they were always out with Betty, and he was more than ever confirmed in his first impression.

"And Aunt Emma does not care, nor feel it one bit," she continued passionately. "She says he will come out of himself ; perhaps she will be sorry when he is dead, and she loses his legacy."

Strange, he thought, that even Maria Finny had never mentioned that Miss Elizabeth Redmond was out of her mind.

"Do not excite yourself," he said, soothingly. "It will be all right, I am sure ; just leave it in my hands, and I will see after him—if you will only allow me to take you home first."

Could a professional mad doctor say more ? he thought, with warm self-approval.

"Go home," she echoed, stamping her foot. "And leave him here to die—he that is so fond of me—that is my very shadow—that loves me better than anything in the world. What do you think I am made of ?—a block of stone ? No never. I will stay here till he is brought out, either dead or alive—if I stay for a week. Well, what are you waiting for ? If you want to be of some use, you might dig."

"Sure it's only a dog, sir," explained Pat, as he looked up into his employer's sorely perplexed countenance. "It's only Jones, and 'tis himself is a born devil for hunting rabbits, and going to ground like any ferret."

"Oh, Mr. Holroyd, you offered to help ; help me to dig him out," said the girl, seizing a spade. "I will do anything for you if you will only save him. Pat, I will give you five shillings ! he is choking in there," she went on distractedly. "Listen to his bark, how faint it is, fainter than it was an hour ago. He is dying, I am sure of it." And she burst into fresh tears.

George Holroyd leant his gun against a tree, and promptly took hold of a spade, and commenced operations with a will. Beauty in distress must ever appeal to the heart of a young man ; only this was not Beauty—far from it—but Beauty's cousin—besides, George loved dogs, and he worked with all his zeal and strength for the sake of the sporting little terrier, whilst Pat laboured and grubbed, and carried out earth with hard horny hands. After twenty minutes' incessant toil, through moss and roots, and frost-bound earth, there was a scream of delight from Betty, and a very dirty, frightened terrier struggled forth, and was clasped instantly in her arms.

"Oh, you bad, bad dog," she murmured ecstatically, as she kissed the top of his head : "how dare you give me such a fright ? What should we have done if you had been lost, and spoiled the set ? You shall be kept in the stable for a week, on bread and water, for this."

And she set him down to receive the boisterous congratulations of "Brown" and "Robinson."

"I don't know how to thank you," she said, now turning to Mr. Holroyd—"Nor Pat.—Pat, come up to the house this evening for your five shillings."

"And my reward," enquired George. "I worked twice as hard as Pat!" Thinking that despite her fiery nose and eyes, she had pretty white teeth and a singularly sweet smile. "You know you said I might have anything I asked for."

"Oh! that was in the agonies of the moment!"

"Then you would repudiate your offer. Miss Betty, I am surprised at you!"

"No, no, I never, as the people here say, 'go back from my word'; only I have so little worth offering," now following happy Pat, who slouched along, laden with the gun and rabbits. "I have no possessions of the smallest value, nothing but an old watch that goes for about three hours, and a battered locket, that Jones has chewed."

"Well, I will not enforce my claim now. I shall bide my time, and remind you of your promise some day. Perhaps I had better have it down in writing?"

"Perhaps you had," she answered with a laugh.

"You appear to be very fond of dogs," he remarked, as he walked beside her.

"I am indeed. I look upon them almost as if they were my relations. I have——" and she paused.

"You were going to say something," he suggested politely.

"I have so few relations."

"Mrs. and Miss Redmond."

"Very distant connections by marriage. I have one uncle in India, whom I have never seen; he is my only near kith or kin."

"Perhaps what you lack in relatives, you make up in friends; some people think *they* are the best of the two."

"Yes, I am very well off for friends—friends among my school-fellows, and friends over here—there are the Moores of Roskeen, and the Mahon girls, and Miss Dopping, and your sister, Cuckoo."

"Miss Dopping and Cuckoo! What a contrast; rather a scratch pair as the Major would say."

"May be so, but they suit me exactly. Miss Dopping is my house friend, and Cuckoo is my companion out of doors."

"And have you summer and winter friends, and fine weather and wet weather friends?"

"No, I have *no* fine weather friend; you don't understand. Miss Dopping is old and does not go out much. She and I like the same people in books, and we read and talk over things, and she tells me about old times, and teaches me various matters, and lectures me now and then."

"Yes, and Cuckoo? Does she lecture you and talk about old times?"

"No, indeed, *I* lecture her; we run after the Harriers together, and botanise, and go nutting, and black-berrying."

George began to think that a walk with this original girl was an agreeable novelty, and was rather sorry to see the garden walls of Noone looming through the trees. In a narrow path leading from the garden gate, they nearly fell over Lodge Juggy, with her apron very full of something, and if she could be said to blush—she blushed, as she stood right in their way, dropping hurried courtesies.

"Oh, Juggy," exclaimed Betty, "where are you going; what have you got there?"

"Just a lock of old cabbage laves for the pig, miss, that Mike was throwing out."

"What small cabbages—they are the shape of potatoes," said Betty, looking steadily at Juggy's apron.

"Well, there is a couple or so, and I won't deny it, miss, but sure, times is hard, terribly hard, Miss Betty, and *you* mind the days when your uncle was alive, when I went to mass on me own ass's car, and kept a couple of pigs!"

"And what has happened to you, Juggy?" enquired George sympathetically.

"Well, sir, ever since I offended the Lord and Mrs. Redmond, I'm in a poor way. Sure, I get nothing out of the gate, but what people give me."

"And I hope they are liberal," said George, feeling his pocket.

"There does be no quality passing now; times is changed, but some are not too bad at Christmas. Mrs. Mahon puts a flannel petticoat on me, and Mrs. Maccabe puts a couple of shifts on me, and Miss Dopping puts a pair of boots on me."

"The Graces attiring Venus," muttered the young man to Betty; then louder:

"I hope you will allow me to contribute to your toilet," placing five shillings in her ready hand. "Get yourself one or two larger and stronger aprons; you don't know *how* useful you may find them."

"The Lord love your handsome face!" exclaimed Juggy, upon whom the sarcasm was completely lost. "Faix! it's a real trate to see a gentleman," and, as they passed on, she struck an easy and reflective attitude, and remarked, in a tone of audible approval:

"Och! and wouldn't they make a lovely pair! And wouldn't I go ten miles on me hands and knees to see their wedding?"

George could not restrain a smile, at the preposterous idea of coupling *him* with his present companion.

"What does she mean about offending Mrs. Redmond and the Lord?" he enquired precipitately—trusting that Juggy's compliments had not reached Betty's ears.

"Oh! it's a long story. She has lived at the Lodge for years, and some of her people are not quite respectable. One of her brothers is a

poacher, and another keeps a still. She used to sell his potheen on the sly, and I often wondered *why* she had so many visitors, especially on Sundays, in Uncle Brian's time, for he was an indulgent master, and seemed to think what he called "Juggy's receptions" a great joke, but last year she quarrelled with Foxy Joe—you know Foxy Joe?"

"Yes, I am acquainted with him."

"Well, I believe they had some dispute about money, or whisky, and he informed on her, and told Aunt Emma that she kept a very thriving unlicensed 'public' at the lodge gate, and so, one day, when Juggy declared that she was dying of rheumatism and cold, and had sent up to her house for port wine and a little jam, Aunt Emma marched down to the Lodge, about twelve o'clock at night, and made *me* go with her. We peeped in at one of the front windows, and saw the whole kitchen lit up. One of the best drawing-room lamps was on the dresser, four silver candlesticks had also been borrowed, as well as glasses, and the family punch-bowl, and Mrs. Redmond's pet claret jug. About fifty people were sitting round, drinking and smoking, and shouting 'more power.' There was a fiddler on the table, and Juggy herself and the Mahons' groom, were dancing a frantic jig in the middle of the floor. When Mrs. Redmond flung the door back and stalked in, perhaps you can imagine the scene, for it is beyond my power of description."

"I think I can picture it," said George with a hearty laugh. "Tell me, Miss Betty, how is it that I never see you at Noone? And do you know that I am over almost every afternoon?"

"Oh, yes, I am aware of that, but I have had other engagements. Have you been thinking that I am a sort of Cinderella, hidden in the kitchen among the ashes?" she enquired mischievously.

"Miss
hold
bullet
over
wrap

"No," he stammered; but the idea had occurred to him.

"I don't drink five o'clock tea, and I generally go over and sit with Miss Dopping, who has been ill; besides, I know that Belle is a host in herself."

(She said this in the frank innocence of her heart, and without the faintest *arrière pensée*.)

"The more the merrier," returned George, "we shall have your society this evening at any rate."

"No, I think not. I have a message to take for Mrs. Redmond. You see, Jones has wasted nearly all my day," and she came to a full stop where the pathway led to the avenue.

"Good-bye, then," he said, "since you must go, and remember your promise."

"Yes, I'll remember my promise," she answered gaily. "I am very, very much obliged to you," and she held out her hand.

He took it in his. What a cold, slender, little hand. It gave him a grateful, cordial shake, like a hearty schoolboy, and in another second its proprietor had disappeared in the deepening dusk.

And so that was Betty! who came into a room like a blast of wind, according to Major Malone, and whom his mother had called "a beautiful, warm-hearted, young creature." Well, on the whole, he rather liked her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS DOPPING TO THE RESCUE.

"A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse."

"MISS DOPPING'S cold had taken a terrible strong hold of her," according to the maid who issued bulletins at her hall door, and she sat cowering over the fire in what she called her "museum," wrapped in a woollen shawl, munching liquorice

ball, and reminding herself that she was seventy-five years of age, and could not expect to live for ever!

Each afternoon Betty had appeared, escorted by her dogs, all brisk and cheerful, and, whilst Brown ate biscuits, and Jones conscientiously drew the room for mice, Betty read aloud, wound worsted, answered letters, and amused her; but to-day, thanks to Jones's misadventure, there was no Betty, and the old lady was feeling unusually low and forlorn. Her drawing-room (or museum) was a strange apartment for an elderly spinster. If you were told that it was the sanctum of a sporting squire, you would not have been surprised, for it was essentially a man's room, from the tanned skins of defunct hunters spread about the floor, the walls covered with brushes, horse-shoes, and sporting prints (prints setting forth slender-waisted riders, charging impossible rails on short-tailed thoroughbreds, or spanking coaches-and-four, or flat races) to the venerable old fox-hound, dozing on the rug.

Miss Sally Dopping came of a very horsey family, and had ruled her father's sporting establishment for many years; but he had been cut off by a coaching accident, and her only brother had broken his neck in a steeplechase. The Doppings generally met their deaths by flood or field; a natural death in a four-poster would be an unnatural death to them. Miss Sally herself had followed the hounds with reckless persistence, in a black skirt and scarlet jacket; delighting the male sex, and horrifying their wives and daughters, for a fox-hunting lady was not a common or popular spectacle fifty years ago; but Miss Sally did not care a button for the local Mrs. Grundy. She swallowed a bowl of strong broth at eight o'clock in the morning, and set off on her well-bred, rat-

tailed hunter, to the nearest meet and enjoyed herself vastly. She paid ceremonious visits to her neighbours, in her mother's old green chariot, and was quite as stiff and snubby to them as they were to her. Indeed, to tell the truth, they were all afraid to say much to her *face*—and she feared no one—for Sally had the reputation of having a high temper, and, it was whispered, had once boxed another lady's ears. She was an old woman now, who had out-lived her generation and her relations, and was never known to lift her hand to mortal, merely contenting herself with speaking her mind *quite* plainly, and going her own way. There were no traces of "Gallop Sal" in the wealthy old maid, beyond that she was still an excellent judge of a horse, and had been known, under strong provocation, to rap out a full-bodied oath. Despite her eccentricities (which were not a few—she used a toothpick, rarely wore a cap, and had been seen sitting with her feet on the chimney-piece), she was very popular among the country people, and in great request at their hospitable houses. She took a far higher social position than miserly Mrs. Redmond, or meek Mrs. Malone, even although she lived in the *town*! People said that she and old Brian Redmond had been lovers once, but that they had fallen out over a horse, and that that was the reason of her strong partiality for Betty; but some people will say anything.

"Was that Betty's knock?" she said to herself.

No, "Bachelor" never growled at Betty's step! It was Maria Finny in a damp waterproof, who, noting from over her blind that Miss Dopping's daily visitor had failed her, ran over to see how she was getting on?

"Oh, well I am just getting on like all of us. *You* are getting on yourself, Maria."

"Yes," she admitted, as she removed her cloak.

and drew near the fire. "But I am not getting on like Belle Redmond. I should be sorry to be a town's talk like her."

"The town is always ready to talk. I've a mind to buy a flaxen wig and a pair of pink tights, and give it something to gabble about in earnest. Well, and what has Belle been doing now?"

"She has that young Holroyd there every day of his life," returned Maria, who, having a budget of news, was speechfully happy.

"Pooh, what rubbish; he has only been here ten days, and, may be, he has nowhere else to go to—or perhaps you expect him to hang up his hat in *your* hall, Maria."

"No, Miss Dopping, you know I do not, but he is a nice gentlemanly young man, and surely to goodness, you would not like to see him ruined for life! He has been very liberal to his mother. She was down the street paying bills a few days after he came. I saw her myself, going into Maccabe's and Casey's and she has not faced *them* for months."

"Then why the deuce doesn't she look after her son? What is the fool of a woman about? If he marries, she has seen the last of his money, and most likely the last of *him*."

"And don't you know Mrs. Malone by this time?" enquired Maria contemptuously—"a poor helpless creature, all her mind is set on making things pleasant for Mr. Holroyd, keeping him and the Major on good terms, and hiding Denis and his doings from them both."

"Will you tell me one thing, Maria Finny—you know what goes on in the town, if any one does. Since I am confined to the house, I am a good deal at the window."

"You always *are*," interrupted Maria, with her usual acid frankness. Maria, who neither gave nor

accepted quarter. "The song—'Only a Face at the Window,' was surely made about you."

"Tell me, Maria, what is Denis doing in Maccabe's? He is in and out there like a dog in a fair. If it was a *public*, I could understand it, but butchers' meat throws me fairly off the scent."

"Off the scent, are you? And hasn't Mrs. Maccabe more than beef and mutton in her shop? Hasn't she a pretty niece?"

"Nonsense, Maria! hold your blistering, scurrilous tongue," said the old lady, pushing her chair back, with great violence.

"Tongue, or no tongue, I've an eye in my head," returned Maria undauntedly. "Lizzie is one of your still waters, with her sleek hair, and downcast eyes, and 'yes, Miss Finny,' and 'no, Miss Finny'—scarcely above her breath. She is as deep as a draw-well. I saw Denis and her walking together in the bog road last Sunday."

"Then, by my oath, if her aunt knew it, she would just flay her alive," said Miss Dopping, excitedly.

"I daresay she would! But never mind Lizzie just now; trust me, there will be enough about *her* by and bye, or I am much mistaken. Do you know that the Major is going on with his tricks, and his betting, worse than ever? Jane Bolland says that he sends as many as six telegrams a day—and always about racing. There will be a fine ruiction there soon, and George Holroyd will have to support the whole family. If he marries Belle Redmond, he will have his hands full. When she is in a passion, she is like a mad woman; she threw a lighted candle at Katey Brady, they say, for spoiling a petticoat, and indeed I think there must be a touch of madness in the family. She is so restless, and fond of gay colours, and has the eyes and laugh of a woman who would go out of her mind for very little. I pity George Holroyd."

"He will never marry her, Maria," rejoined Miss Dopping emphatically.

"*She* will marry him, and it comes to the same thing," returned Maria, with great determination. "They have a fire in the drawing-room every day, and she wears her best clothes, and walks back with him through the woods with a shawl over her head, leaning on his arm too! and is always sending him notes by Foxy Joe. I went over there myself one day, with a collecting card; of course *that* was a fool's errand! but I wanted to see how the land lay, and indeed," with a sniff of virtuous scorn, "I saw enough! I wonder if Mr. Holroyd knows about that officer in the Sky Blues!"

"Not he," replied Miss Dopping in her sharpest key. "If he must take a wife from Noone, why does he not take Betty?"

"Betty! that wild slip, running about the country with Cuckoo, after every old fern, and fossil?"

"And is it not more respectable than to be running after a young man?" enquired the other, forcibly. "She is eighteen, she is well educated, and she really *is* a lady."

"She is only an awkward slip of a girl; her eyes and hair, are not too bad, but *I* call her very plain, with her thin cheeks and pasty face."

"Plain!" echoed Miss Dopping, shrilly.

"Yes, and what else?" retorted Maria, stoutly.

"Just listen to *me*, Maria. Old Robert Lynch, who was a terrible man for the ladies in his day, and the best of judges, saw her once, and said that in a year or two, she will be able to give two stone and a beating to any girl in the country. He said he would keep his eye on her."

"I would not doubt him, the old scamp! Bob Lynch ought to be thinking of his sins, and of his

latter end, instead of talking trash," said Maria, severely. "However, Betty is not out yet."

"And when she does come out," retorted her champion, "you'll find there will be half-a-dozen young men waiting on the steps to marry her—and so George is at Noone every day?"

"Yes, for hours," replied Miss Finny, in a tone that was almost tragic.

"Well, I see only two chances for him—and they are either to break his neck, or to run away from that scheming, brazen creature."

"I know he is asked to Goole for the cock shooting, and to the Kaness' for hunting," continued Maria confidentially, "for Jane Bolland noticed the postmarks and crests. It is a grand thing for a young man to come into this part of the world, where bachelors are scarce and girls are in dozens. Mrs. Malone showed me a whole row of notes, waiting for him on the chimney-piece, and really, the first Sunday he was in church, the way the girls flocked round him afterwards—by the way of speaking to his mother—was shameless! The Rodes, the Lynches, and the Wildes, that scarcely look at her from year's end to year's end."

"Why does he not go off hunting?" enquired Miss Dopping. "He must be a queer sort of a molly-coddle of a young man, if *that* does not tempt him."

"He has no horse yet; the Major has been trying to sell him every old screw in the country, but he is too sharp for him and so——"

"And so he goes over and idles, and risks himself at Noone, I see. Well, he is a pleasant young fellow, and was very civil, even to an old hag like me, so I'll do my best for him. I will get the Moores to ask him over, and I'll speak a word to the Major! And now, Maria, that will do for to-day. I am not very strong, and a little of *you* goes

a long way. There is your cloak, there is your umbrella, good-bye, and don't bang the front-door."

As soon as the same door had been shut, with a violence that shook the house from garret to cellar (for Maria was not pleased), Miss Dopping hurried over to the seat she always occupied in the window, drew her shawl over her head, and peered into the street. She frequently sat in this nook, watching passers-by, and knocked loudly on the pane at any she specially wished to see, usually—almost always—*men*. She vastly preferred their society to that of her own sex, and openly gloried in the fact. Major Malone, Dr. Doran, Sir Forbes Gould, Lord Mudrath, the Parish Priest, were indiscriminately summoned in from time to time, to have a talk and a glass of good wine—and came right willingly. She was an aggressively hospitable old lady. No one was permitted to leave her house without partaking of some refreshment, whether it was port wine and a biscuit, a cup of tea and seed cake, or even a glass of milk! To refuse was to offend her seriously. The very drivers who brought her visitors on hack cars were sure of a bottle of porter. Eating and drinking was in her opinion, an outward and visible token of inward goodwill. Now she sits in the window, watching for the Major, and here he comes at last, rolling out of the post office. She rapped at him sharply with her knuckles, and soon afterwards his red face, and ample waistcoat, presented themselves in the doorway.

"Sit down, Major," said his hostess effusively, "sit down; come over near the fire and tell me all the news. You are a great stranger these times, a great stranger."

"Upon my word, Miss Sally," rubbing his hands briskly, "I haven't a word of news, good or bad. Have you?"

"What! and you only just out of the post office! Oh! come, come. Have you heard that your step-son is making great running over at Noone. How would you like Belle for a daughter-in-law?"

"Faith," drawing forth and flourishing a silk handkerchief, "I admire his taste."

"Well, it's more than I do," said Miss Dopping acrimoniously; "an idle, useless, ornamental hussey, that never gets out of bed till twelve in the day, and that can't do a hand's turn beyond trimming a bonnet, and squalling French songs—and I am not saying *anything* about her temper. However, he has private means and he will want them all——"

"Oh, he is not serious," interrupted the Major, speaking hastily, and with visible alarm. "There is nothing in it, upon my sacred word of honour. Of course, he admires Belle, we all do; he is not a marrying man; he has no idea of marrying."

"But *she* has, and he is always there, singing and tea-drinking; more by token he has nothing else to do."

"I'm after a horse for him, but he is so plaguey hard to please."

"Yes, he's not to be pleased with one of your old garrons; and let me tell you this, Tom Malone, that if you can't put your hand on something better soon, it's a lady's hack he will be wanting."

"I see," nodding his head several times. "The wind of the word is enough for Tom Malone. I'll write to my cousin to-night. I don't want the poor fellow to be hooked like that," he added, with a keen sense of favours to come. "I'll write—— No, by Jove, as I am near the post office, I'll telegraph! I'll just run over now."

The Major's running was of course a mere figure of speech, a sort of hurried waddle; he lost no

time and clattered downstairs, and speedily despatched the following message to his cousin, Mike Malone :

"Rail at once your artillery mare, or Clancy's colt. Leave price to me. Guarantee satisfaction"; to which an answer came that same evening : "Mare sold, am sending Clancy's colt."

CHAPTER IX.

CLANCY'S COLT.

"His manliness won every heart.

—ASHLEY.

BEHOLD a lovely morning in late November—a morning borrowed from Spring, as bright and sunny as if it had been advanced by the liberal month of May. True, that as yet there had been but little frost, that the South of Ireland is proverbially mild, and the pleasure-ground at Bridgetstown a notoriously sheltered and favoured spot. Chrysanthemums—yellow and brown—still braved the nipping wintry air, hollyhocks, dahlias, and pale monthly roses as yet held up their heads; laurels and holly glistened in seasonable green, and a gorgeous Virginia creeper flaunted along the grey garden wall.

On such a morning, George Holroyd came whistling across the pleasure-ground in search of his mother. She was extremely fond of flowers, and if hoarding up shilling to shilling was Mrs. Redmond's passion, and deepest earthly enjoyment, grubbing, transplanting, nursing, and potting was hers. George swung back the garden gate, till it shivered on its hinges, and beheld his mother, and a tall girl, promenading along the central gravel walk. His mother was leaning upon her companion's arm, and carried an earthy trowel in one

hand—they were evidently engaged in earnest conversation. On hearing the gate slam, they both turned towards him, and could it be possible that his mother's *confidante* was Betty Redmond? For a moment he doubted her identity, so great was the difference between smiles and tears—between a wild rose complexion and a countenance sodden and swollen with crying—between a dull misty afternoon, and a brilliant morning. The sun brought out the bronze tints of Betty's brown hair, and was reflected in the depths of her deep grey eyes—eyes of that mystic shade, that can be soft with joy or love, brimming with sympathy, dancing with mirth, or dark as night with grief or jealousy. Such eyes are wont to dazzle, and into their depths it is most dangerous for a young man to gaze, unless he would be their slave for life. Luckily for mankind, the power of these eyes was unknown to their possessor; to her, they were merely a pair of useful organs, that saw well, slept well, and wept well—to the latter George Holroyd could bear testimony. Betty had discarded her waterproof, and wore a well-fitting blue serge gown, a black straw sailor's hat, in which was jauntily stuck two bits of scarlet geranium, the very last of the season. She was tall and slight, and as George looked, he agreed with his mother—Betty Redmond was beautiful. Hers was a style that bore a searching light, the open air, the bold unflattering sun. Belle looked best in dim rose-shaded lamp-light, or within the circuit of a fire, whose blaze was reproduced in her magnificent dark orbs. Belle was a brilliant hot-house azalea, and Betty a bit of white mountain heather.

It is true that her nose was not as neatly chiselled as her cousin's, and that her small white teeth were somewhat irregular; nevertheless Betty was a pretty girl, and found great favour in

George Holroyd's eyes; but whether she was a "warm-hearted young creature" he had yet to discover.

"This is my son, George," explained Mrs. Malone proudly. "George, don't you know Betty? I mean Miss Elizabeth Redmond."

"Yes," replied George. "I have already had the pleasure of making her acquaintance. I helped her to excavate a treasure in the upper wood at Noone."

Betty coloured to her brow, for his eyes were looking straight into hers, with an expression that confused and vexed her—an expression of undisguised admiration.

"I am fortunate in meeting you, Miss Betty," he continued, "for it strikes me, that we are like the little couple in the weather-glass house. When I am here, you are at Noone; when I am at Noone, you are here."

"I come over to read with Cuckoo two mornings a week; we take it month about—it is my turn to come to her," returned the girl looking at him steadily.

If Mr. Holroyd was going to stare at her in that odd way, she would dislike him extremely. Mr. Holroyd read her haughty young face like a book. What a pretty mouth and chin she had—a pretty mouth that looked as if it could speak proud things!

"I wish you would allow me to come and do lessons with you," he returned with a smile. "I am shockingly ignorant, my spelling is shaky, and my geography deplorable."

"I think it more likely we should learn from you; you have seen so much of the world, and so many strange places and people. I am sure you could teach us a great deal."

"I could teach you Hindustani and the new sword exercise, and how to load cartridges."

"Ah! I am afraid that your instruction would be wasted on us," she answered, looking after Mrs. Malone, who had been hurried off to the hot bed by Joe the gardener.

"May I ask what you are doing?" he enquired, glancing at a hammer and some pieces of scarlet cloth she held in her hand. "Have you been cutting up the Major's uniform?"

"I have been nailing up the Cloth of Gold rose, which the wind has blown down; but you see there are some trails that I could not reach," pointing to them as she spoke.

In another instant, George was on the ladder, receiving nails and bits of cloth, and particular directions, gazing down into a pair of beautiful upturned eyes. The full effect of a pair of exquisite upturned eyes must be experienced to be appreciated! George studied them gravely. Something told him that it was no ordinary maiden who held the ladder; he must not flirt with this innocent inexperienced girl. No, no; Honour stood by with her finger on her lips.

"You seem to know your way about here pretty well," he observed, *apropos* of Bridgetstown, when they had conversed with frank companionship for some time.

"Yes, I am quite at home. I have been coming here since I was a little thing. Your mother calls me her eldest daughter."

"Then I am your brother, of course."

"No, no, that does not follow by any means; you are a stranger at Ballingoole."

"Yes, I know I am only a mere Englishman, but I hope I shall be presented with the freedom of the town. Mrs. Finny assures me that I am an honoured and distinguished visitor."

"What would be the good of the freedom of the

town? You are a soldier—a wanderer on the face of the earth."

"That is true, I am a rolling stone, and don't care much about the moss."

"You like the life, then?"

"Yes, I could not conceive any other; it suits me down to the ground."

"And what will you do when you are what the Major calls 'kicked out'?"

"I am sure I don't know; loaf round, I suppose, until it is time to die!"

"And how did you like Mrs. Finny?" enquired Betty with a sly smile; "did she make you any sweet speeches?"

"She made me *blush*! a thing I have not done for years! Butter should be applied in small quantities, with a delicate silver knife, and not administered by the half-pound with a trowel. However, it pleased my mother."

"*Only* your mother?" with merry incredulous eyes.

"Yes, my sensitive nature, and highly-strung nerves——"

"Your what?" she interrupted, and they both burst out laughing. Mrs. Malone heard the laugh, at the bottom of the garden—and was delighted to think that her handsome soldier son and her favourite visitor were getting on so well.

At this instant the garden gate again opened with a clang, and admitted the graceful and vivacious Cuckoo.

"George!" she screamed. "Oh! there you are; what *are* you doing up the ladder?"

"Looking for birds' nests, as you may see!"

"Cuckoo!" exclaimed Betty tragically, "it is not *possible* that you are out in your new shoes?"

"Yes, I'm in a hurry. I have something to tell George, something he would like to hear. Only he

is so rude that I think I shall keep him waiting, marking time, as *he* calls it."

"I rude!" he echoed; "my good Cuckoo, you are joking."

"Yes, you know you called me a little pig only yesterday."

"But of course, I meant a *pretty* little pig," he rejoined as he carefully selected a nail, and drove it into the wall. "What are your tidings, fairest of the fair?"

"A horse has come for you—such a beauty?"

"By Jove, you don't say so!" jumping down as he spoke. "Everything comes to him who waits!"

"Yes. But I heard the man that brought him telling Knox, not to go near his heels, for he was a born devil, but that the Major wouldn't mind *that*, and he winked; why did he wink, George?"

"Where did he come from?" enquired her brother as eagerly as a boy of ten. "He is not an old friend, is he?"

"He came from near Cousin Mick's; he belongs to a man named Clancy—a tenant of his."

"Let us go and inspect him, instantly, Miss Redmond, that is if you care about looking at him; but any one who is so devoted to dogs *must* be fond of horses."

Betty admitted the impeachment, and they hurried towards the house, whilst Cuckoo went shrieking down the garden: "Mother! mother! come and look at George's new horse."

In a very short time, the whole establishment was collected on the lawn, surveying the recent arrival, with critical eyes. The Major with his legs very wide apart, and a toothpick in his mouth, carried on a whispered conversation with a pale-faced little man, in extraordinarily tight trousers, now holding his head this side, and now on *that* like a crow peeping down a marrow bone.

Every male about the place, from the groom to the message boy, was assembled in solemn conclave, for is not every Irishman born into the world with "an eye for a horse"?

The animal under inspection came out of the ordeal nobly. He proved to be young, well-bred, and sound; a fine upstanding iron grey, five off, with lots of bone below the knee, plenty of room for his bellows, and grand quarters.

And although Sam the groom said, "his colour was against him," and Tom, the message boy, "suspected him of a splint," and he had not "sufficient quality" to please Joe the gardener, yet on the whole, the verdict was in his favour, and he was pronounced to be "a shocking fine colt."

But his price! Well, his price was surprisingly low, and was possibly accounted for by his rolling eye, and extremely animated manners.

According to the little wizened groom who led him (by preference) "he was an outrageous lepper, and could jump a town, was never known to turn his head from anything, and had a cruel turn of speed."

Being requested to canter him quietly round the lawn, and exhibit his paces, he refused with considerable decision. He declared that he had the lumbago so badly he could not sit in a saddle, and had not been on a horse's back for months.

"Let the gentleman throw a leg across the harse, and try him for himself."

The gentleman who was greatly taken with the animal, was nothing loth, and promptly advanced to mount him.

"Take him aisy, your honour," muttered the groom, as he let down the stirrup leathers. "Take him kindly, he is young, and ye must just *flatter* him a bit at the first go-off."

But the horse scornfully refused to be taken aisy

or flattered. He had been standing for some time, and was possibly cold, and certainly impatient ; he had not been ridden for weeks (for reasons known to his groom).

Consequently when he was mounted and let go, he lashed out with his heels in a manner that rapidly scattered his admirers, made two vicious buck jumps, and then bolted ; going immediately down the avenue, at the rate of twenty miles an hour.

"And the gate is shut !" gasped Mrs. Malone, as she clutched Betty's arm convulsively ; "the gate—the iron gate."

Betty stood still and held her breath ; they all stood and gazed, in expectation of some horrible catastrophe ; for the avenue gate was over four feet high, with strong spikes along the top bar.

"Thank God," exclaimed Mrs. Malone, breaking a painful silence, as the grey, who had a fall of the ground with him, sailed over it like a deer.

"At last he can leap," remarked Sam the groom, wiping the perspiration off his forehead with his sleeve.

"And where is he *now* ?" asked the Major in an angry voice.

"He is away up the Roskeen Road," shouted Tom, who had swarmed up a tree. "Faix, he nearly did it *that* time ; he was just into Mrs. Maccabe's cart. Hurroo ! the Captain has got a pull at him, and is taking him across country, he—he has gone slap through Dooley's haggard and potato garden, and now—now, now he is making for the canal."

And with this cheering announcement, Tom climbed down, declaring that he could see nothing more.

In less than half-an-hour George and the grey came trotting back, intact, and apparently on the

best of terms with one another, although they were both very hot ; the grey had lost two shoes, and his rider his cap.

"He has no more mouth than a stone wall," said George as he got off. "But he *can't* fall. He took Dooley's boundary as if it were a cart rut. I've knocked the conceit out of him a bit ; he was heading for the canal, but when he found it was all the same to *me*, he shut off steam."

"George, my dear boy, what a terrible horse !" cried Mrs. Malone. "I was sure you would have been killed, when he went at the gate."

"Yes, like the old lady I thought that "every moment would be my next," till I discovered that he could jump. He is all right, mother, he only wants exercise, there is no fear of me. And I mean to buy him."

"Your father was a splendid rider, George ; no horse ever conquered him. You take after him, I see." And she looked at her handsome, eager-eyed son, with an air of melancholy pride.

"What do *you* say to him, Miss Betty ?" he enquired. "You shall ride him if you like, some of these days, when he is better bitted, and broken."

"Betty is a nailer to ride. She'd back anything," volunteered Denis in his gruff voice.

"He is not a lady's horse," objected the Major, "though handling and exercise is all he wants. Only for this gout of mine I'd buy him myself, and have him as quiet as a sheep by the end of the week ; it's all hands, sir, hands—and I don't think much of *yours*. Eh ! what ? what ?"

The Major was sorely vexed at George's success, and the unmistakable admiration that his riding had evoked, from a notoriously critical class. The Major himself was no horseman ; a lamentable exhibition in the saddle ; he had a capital seat in a dog-cart, that was all.

Presently, as the cowed and subdued grey was about to be led off to the stable, with drooping head and heaving sides, Cuckoo rushed at the groom excitedly, and said:

"You have not told us his name. What is he called?"

"Faix! the only name I ever heard put on him was Clancy's mad colt, but I believe he was christened 'Scatter Brains,'" replied the little man with a sly smile, as he led his charge away, to have a rub down and a feed.

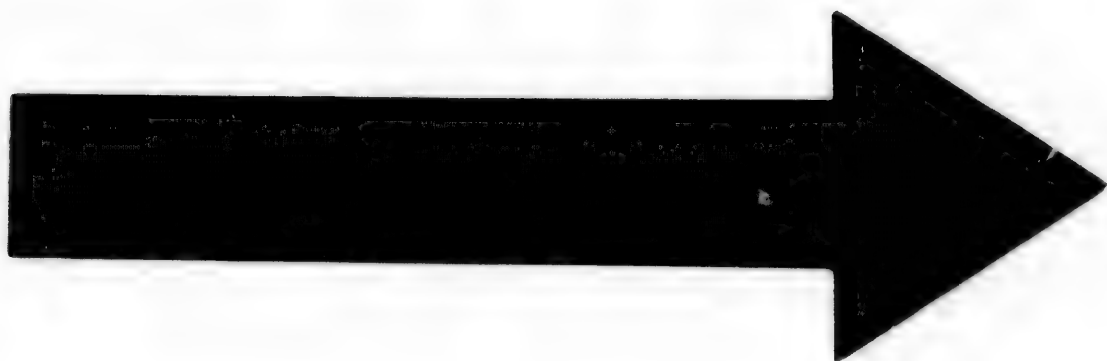
That evening "Scatter Brains" was purchased by George Holroyd for seventy-five guineas, and a luckpenny to the groom, who received it, and a glass of whisky, with an expression of intense satisfaction—not to say relief.

"You are not from this part of the world, are you?" enquired George by way of conversation.

"No, your honour, I was formerly a native of Cork, and I would not tell your honour a lie."

"And of where are you *now* a native?"

"Well—I've been at Clancy's this fifteen years. I see you can ride, sir," he continued confidentially. "So I've no shame or fear in telling you, that that horse requires a power of humouring. I've never walked straight since the last time he got shut of me. We are not sorry to part with him; he has a desperate trick of bolting, and for nothing at all! When you are just walking innocently along the road, he is away with you. He has a terrible bad name, and that's why ye got him chape; they does be all in dread of him! But there is just wan resource, for a man with nerve, and I'll tell it to you. Pretend you *like* it—I never could—and that will cure him. When he bolts with hounds (as in course he always does), and mostly lames a couple of dogs, stick in the spurs, and lam into him with a *new* ashplant,



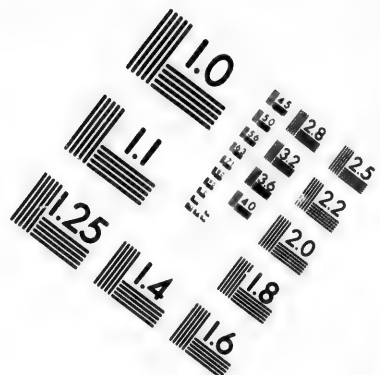
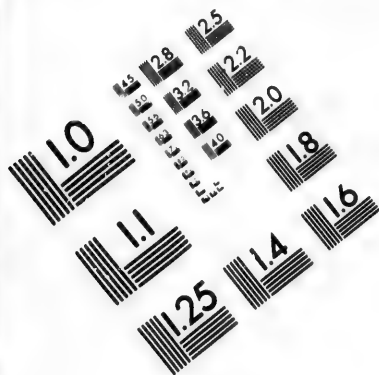
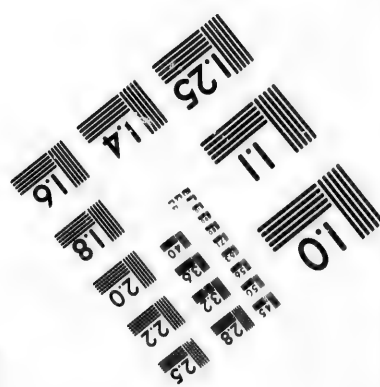
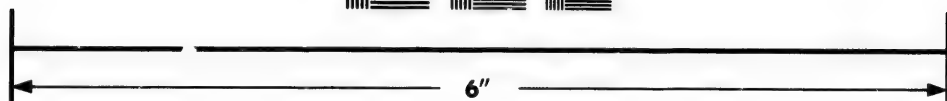
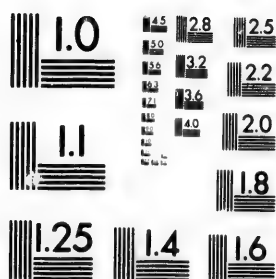


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until he is fit to drop, just give him his head, *and* the stick : he could not fall if he tried, and when ye feel him under you, just devouring the ground, and greedy to be airing himself over an eighteen foot gripe and double, ye would not grudge three hundred sovereigns ; he is a chaser, that's what *he* is, and invaluable to a stout rider, a bold man like yourself—but many and many's the time I thought he would make a ghost of *me*."

"And have you lost your nerve?"

"Between ourselves, sir," lowering his voice, "I have, I haven't a pinch left. I've scarcely a whole bone in me skin. I was first a riding boy, and then a jock, and then a breaker-in, and I have had some extraordinary bad falls. Well, sir, since you *are* so pressing, I'll take just another tinte of whisky, and wishing long life and good luck to your honour, and many a good day on the grey," and so somewhat unsteadily departed.

CHAPTER X.

BETTY MAKES TWO CONQUESTS.

SHORTLY after his purchase of "Scatter Brains," Mr. Holroyd appeared at a popular meet of the Harriers, got up in unimpeachable boots and breeches, but somewhat spoiling the effect, by carrying the proscribed ashplant. He and his mount were critically scanned by the sporting community—who sat ranged along the top of a low wall, bordering the road, and subsequently pursued on foot.

The grey horse was unanimously approved of, "passed," and pronounced to be a grand one and a goer, and invidious comparisons were audibly drawn between him and an old "Stageen," on which another gentleman was mounted. All at

once, a shrill gossoon exclaimed, as if announcing a most portentous discovery:

"I have it, boys! May I never ate, bite, or sup, if it isn't Clancy's grey."

"Clancy's grey," echoed another voice, "that he has been striving to sell this two year and more! Oh, the poor, innocent, young English officer!" then in a louder key to George, "Don't be riding *too* far from a churchyard, yer honour?"

"Is there a doctor out the day?" enquired a third pleasantly.

"Mother av Moses! why didn't ye bring your coffin with ye?"

So far "Clancy" (as he was called, the other name being too suggestive) had been behaving amazingly well, merely snorting and glaring and prancing; even as they trotted up the soft green fields to draw the furrows, he only moved as if stepping upon hot bricks, with now and then a sidle and a squeal. But once the hare was found, and there was a bustle, and a rush forward at a narrow razor bank, with a big gripe on the near side, he cocked his ears, and practically took leave of the field, as if he had urgent private affairs, going at racing pace, and carrying his rider over it before he had time to breathe. He soon outpaced the furious huntsman, and the fleeting hounds, lastly the hare, and was making with all speed for his stable at Bridgetstown. He jumped very big, and appeared to know all about it, and as the fences seemed sound, George sat down in his saddle, and let him have it with the ashplant! A wilder career was seldom seen. "Clancy" tore along like a thing possessed, flying over hedges, till they seemed to whizz past. Once or twice, he landed on his nose, but struggled up in a second, and was going again as hard as ever. Cuckoo, Betty, and Denis, posted on a neighbour-

ing hill, with an old red spy-glass, watched his headlong course, with breathless interest.

"There he is in Hourrigan's land, and now he is over Murphy's boundary," shouted Denis slapping his leg; "that horse would win the Liverpool if he was put in training!—why, he is making for those boggy fields near the canal. He had better mind himself. Whew! there he goes in plump, *that* will cook his goose, and unless I am much mistaken, he will lay down his knife and fork!"

George had been prepared for this emergency, and had taken his feet out of the stirrups, and when his somewhat blown hunter skinned a low bank, and landed in what *looked* like beautiful green grass, but was really soft treacherous bog, he was off his back in an instant. "Clancy" struggled madly, snorted and panted with fear, but the more he struggled the deeper he sank; in a very short time he was up to his girths. "You want a lesson my friend," remarked his master, calmly lighting a cigarette. "A nice condition my boots are in! You must learn that this unpleasant state of affairs is the natural result of running away, and that it is my turn now."

At length, when the grey was completely exhausted, and had subsided so much that his situation began to be a little precarious, his owner had compassion on him, and he and Denis, and a couple of labouring men, with ropes, helped him out, a shameful, pitiful spectacle, a black horse with a grey head! He appeared to feel his position very keenly, skulking home along the edge of the roads with his tail tucked between his legs, as if saying to the hedges, "*Hide me!*"

After this experience, "Clancy" became a comparatively reformed character, and merely amused himself with prancing, and plunging at the meets, and subsequently making an example of the whole field.

The Major discovered, to his intense disgust, that his stepson had got a wonderful bargain—a prize he was resolved to secure for himself on that young man's departure. "Clancy" was well aware that his new owner was a strong bold rider, who was his master; and, although he was by no means a mount for a timid, elderly gentleman, he was a mount for a brave young lady, and Miss Dopping's old face lit up with keen delight, when she saw Betty Redmond, sitting squarely on the grey, as he clattered up the town, escorted by George on the Major's dog-cart mare, and Cuckoo on the blacksmith's pony. The grey was a rare fencer in a big country, and sailed over everything that came in his way, with equal satisfaction to himself (for he had a craze for fencing) and his rider; his performances with the foxhounds were noted by "The Man at the Cross Roads" in the *Irish Times*, and the Major took extraordinary credit to himself, as he attended the meets on wheels, and flourished his red silk pocket handkerchief, and pointed out his purchase to his friends, saying in his loud hoarse voice:

"You see old Tom Malone has an eye for a horse yet." (All the same, Tom Malone had never been credited with this particular class of eye, at any period!)

"Look at that grey my stepson is riding. I bought him, and dirt cheap too. He can make a holy show of every horse in the country; he is a chaser, that's what he is, and would fetch three hundred any day. Eh? What? What?"

* * * * *

George, with his hunter and his gun, was now frequently absent from Ballingooole, staying in various hospitable country houses with recent acquaintances, with relations of brother officers, or with hunting men. His mother was gratified: she

"liked to see her bairn respected like the lave." The Major was gratified from other reasons, and the only person who was dissatisfied was Belle. Was her prize to be snatched away from her, by the hungry, scheming mothers of anxious marriageable daughters?

Or would absence make his heart grow fonder of her—or of somebody else?"

Early in February, the meet of the Runmore foxhounds happened to be a central one, and within two miles of Ballingoole; this was always one of the great events of the season, when all the population, gentle and simple, turned out *en masse*. The labourers had a holiday, the townspeople closed their shops, and every jaunting car and ass's, cart in the parish, took the road to Drubberstown Cross. Even Belle, who hated fox-hunting, secured a seat in the Mahons' wagonette. The Major was mounted in his dog-cart, George on the grey, and Denis on an elderly, but excellent black mare belonging to the priest. Cuckoo and Betty (who knew every yard of the country and always evinced a most active interest in the harriers) set out at an early hour in Mrs. Malone's donkey car; indeed Betty had had a narrow escape of figuring at the meet, with the bath-chair at her heels, but Belle had not allowed her mother to develop the idea. As long as George Holroyd was in the country, the old lady must forego such carriage exercise. Astute Belle had gathered that he disapproved of her turn out, so Betty and Cuckoo had driven off in a little village cart, behind "Mookieanna," a well-fed sporting donkey—all three being in the highest spirits. The young ladies had laid their plans with much discrimination, and resolved to relinquish the glories of the meet, and to go instead, and take up a strong position, from whence they would be able to see the subsequent run

—if run there was. They drove straight to the Hill of Knock, on the side of which lies a neat gorse patch, a sure warrant for a game fox. Tying Mookieanna to the gate, they walked up through three large bare fields to the cover side, and then discovered, to their intense disgust, crowds of country people assembled close to it, smoking and joking, round several large fires, awaiting the arrival of the hounds.

"It would be hard for them to find a fox here to-day," exclaimed Betty, breathless and angry.

"Faix, and so it would, Miss," calmly assented Mike, Mrs. Redmond's handy man and gardener. "Sure, didn't I see a brace of them break out of it this morning, with my own two eyes, but I'm thinking, maybe *himself* is in it yet."

"There is no use in staying here," said Cuckoo scornfully. "They won't find here, and will go on and draw Coolambar Hill. We have plenty of time to run across to it; it's barely a mile-and-a-half by the short cut. Mike, do you take home the donkey, he is tied below at the gate."

And the two girls girded up their dresses, and fled down the hill, an exceedingly active couple. "They ran like hares," to quote admirers round the cover fires—they climbed, they jumped, they struggled through hedges, with the ease that came from youth, and health, and practice. As they were about to breast Coolambar Hill, Betty paused suddenly with a dramatic gesture, and said:

"Hush! Cuckoo. I *hear* them; they have found!" and sure enough, their listening ears caught the distant whimper of hounds, now giving louder and louder tongue.

Betty's cheeks were scarlet with excitement, and even the pale Cuckoo was moved.

"Here, Cuckoo, climb upon this wall," said her friend, dragging her forward as she spoke, and

nearly pulling her arms out of their sockets ; " we shall have a splendid view."

And on the top of the wall, they stood hand in hand, panting from their recent run, with their eyes eagerly bent on Knock cover. Yes, here come the hounds streaming down, half a dozen little white specks, then the whole pack, then half-a-dozen horsemen, then the whole field.

"Mike was right, you see he *was* at home after all," said Betty, "but oh! he has been headed off by those sheep; he won't come here, he will go for Bresna Wood, six miles away, if it's an inch."

The hounds passed in full cry, within two fields of the girls, closely followed by the huntsman, a steeplechase rider, and a spare-looking whip, on a bony chestnut thoroughbred.

"Here is George," cried Cuckoo, triumphantly; "he is coming into this field, does not 'Clancy' jump beautifully?" as the eager grey negotiated a razor bank, between two deep though narrow ditches.

"And just look at this man—riding jealous"—as another horseman came at the same fence at racing pace.

"Why it's Ghosty Moore!"

The words had scarcely left her lips, when a catastrophe cut short Ghosty's career. His horse, already blown and over-ridden (but willing) took off too far, failed to kick the bank, and fell back into the near gripe, with a loud exclamation from his rider. He and his horse were both completely lost to sight; they had disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed them. A shrill yell from Cuckoo, piercing as a steam whistle, caused her brother to turn his head, and he beheld her running down the field, waving her arms like a windmill gone mad.

Of course he must stop; he pulled in the grey

with considerable difficulty, for Clancy was bent on pursuing! He would be furious if some nonsense of Cuckoo's cost him what looked like the run of the season; he turned his horse, and galloped up to her.

"What the deuce is the matter?" he demanded impatiently.

"A man," she gasped, "a man has been killed," pointing to the ditch, from which there was neither sound nor sign.

George was on the spot in another five seconds, and saw four shining, kicking hoofs, turned upwards, and heard a sickening groan, as of one in mortal agony.

Here was a nice fix! Some fellow under his horse, that horse jammed fast in a narrow gripe ten feet deep, and no one to help him, but a couple of girls!

The hunt had passed to the left—swept on with the inexorable determination of foxhounds running a burning scent; already there was not a soul to be seen, for only the hard riders had come this way—the less keen had taken to a convenient lane. George was off the grey, and down in the ditch, as quick as thought. If he could only get the horse lengthways, he might manage to drag his rider from under him, but this was impossible, single-handed. It looked a serious business, and there was no time to be lost.

"Come down, Cuckoo, like a good girl," he said coaxingly, "come down, and give me a hand. There is no fear of you. I'll take care of that."

Cuckoo peered down with a ghastly face, and saw the struggling iron shoes, the blood upon her brother's gloves, and heard half-stifled moans of anguish.

"I daren't, George. Oh, I daren't!" and she began to cry.

"I dare, I am not afraid," said Betty scrambling hastily into the ditch beside him; "only tell me what I am to do."

"I'll manage the horse, if you can move the man," returned George. "Just put your hands under his arms, very firmly, and hold fast, and when I give you the word, pull with all your strength—*now*."

The experiment proved successful. Mr. Moore was luckily a very light weight, and George Holroyd was a strong man, otherwise he would have remained much longer at the bottom of the ditch; but as it was, after several attempts, these two good Samaritans got him out between them, and laid him on the grass—a truly ghastly object; his head, which had come in contact with a stone, was bleeding profusely; his white face was streaked with blood, and he seemed to be insensible.

George took off his coat, and folded it up into a sort of pillow for the sufferer, then he produced his flask, and endeavoured to pour some of its contents between his closed teeth.

"He is dead! Ghosty Moore is dead," shrieked Cuckoo, and she ran up the field giving vent to a series of agonising screams; she had no nerves whatever, and the sight of blood made her sick and terrified. Yes, even the bold and saucy Cuckoo! she was as useless as the grey, who, with streaming reins, grazed greedily along the hedge row, sublimely indifferent to the fate of his companion, who was struggling in the adjacent ditch. Presently George went down and righted him, and got him out, a limping terrified spectacle, and then he said to Betty who had been trying to bind up the wounded man's head with their handkerchiefs: "Some one must go for help at once, either you or I!"

"There are no cottages near this, and Ballin-

goole is four miles off. You had better go ; you will go faster," she returned promptly.

" But I don't know the way," he replied.

" There is a lane at this gate, and if the gate is locked, try a corner, there's sure to be a gap and then turn to the left, and keep straight out."

" You are certain you don't mind being left here by yourself?" said George, pouring some more sherry down the throat of their unconscious patient ; " you seem to have made a good job with the bandages, but I am afraid his arm is broken, and he seems in a bad way—a very bad way."

They looked at one another gravely.

Supposing he were to die, with no one by him but Betty?—for Cuckoo had actually left the field, and was nowhere to be seen.

" You must take your coat," said the girl, " and place his head in my lap ; it will answer as well, but before you go, bring me some water in your hat."

" Here it is," he said, speedily returning with his dripping property. " And I'll fix his saddle for you to sit on, instead of this wet field."

" No, please don't," she vainly remonstrated, " there is no time to lose, you must not think of *me*."

Nevertheless George thought a good deal about Betty, as he galloped into Ballingooie, in search of Dr. Moran. What a brave girl she was, remaining there alone, with, for all they knew, a dying man. She was just the sort of girl to stand beside one at a pinch ; now he came to think of it, her face was of the heroic type. As to Cuckoo ! he scarcely dared to let his mind dwell on his shameless hysterical young relative, whom he presently overtook proceeding homewards at a kind of shambling-run.

" Cuckoo ! he called out sternly, " I am ashamed of you."

" I am going for help," sobbed Cuckoo, who was

what is known among the lower orders "roaring and crying." "Is—is—he dead yet?"

"Go to the first cabin you come across, and borrow a door and a blanket," shouted her brother, and then pushed on, and was so expeditious, that within an hour the wounded man had been removed from the scene of his accident, and conveyed home carefully in the charge of Dr. Moran. Augustus Moore, nick-named "Ghosty," on account of his white face, lint locks, and spare figure, was the eldest son of Colonel Moore of Roskeen, a county magnate, who possessed not only lands, but money. He was accustomed to see Betty Redmond ever since she was a small child, and he liked her, but something stronger than liking awoke in his bosom, when he came to his senses, and found himself lying with his head in Betty's lap at the foot of Coolambar Hill. He was so stunned, and bruised, and weak, that he firmly believed that he had entered on his last hour; but Betty's presence cheered him. She bathed his face, moistened his dry lips, restored his confidence, and gave him heart in one sense, whilst she took it away in another.

As he lay there, helpless, between sod and sky, with her sympathetic voice in his ears, her sweet anxious face bent over his, he made up his mind, that if he lived, he would like to marry Betty Redmond. This was a curious coincidence, for George Holroyd, as he walked home beside her, that grey wintry afternoon, four long miles through muddy roads and lanes, with "Clancy's" bridle over his arm, had almost come to the same conclusion. At any rate, he told himself that she was the prettiest, pluckiest, and nicest girl it had ever been his luck to know. However an immediate visit to the other side of the country, drew him away from Betty's unexpected fascinations—and they did not meet again for many weeks.

CHAPTER XI.

"INTERRUPTED."

"It is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love."

—MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

BETTY had been unremitting in her attention to Miss Dopping all through the winter, and her virtue was not to be her sole reward! The old lady hired a pair of posters, and drove out to Noone in her mother's green chariot, and had a long private interview with Mrs. Redmond. She was going to the Moores of Roskeen for a week, and they had asked her to bring Betty—It would be by no means Betty's first visit to that part of the world. She and Kathleen Moore were bosom friends; indeed she was a great favourite with the whole family. But this visit would be a more solemn occasion; as Miss Dopping represented to Mrs. Redmond, her young friend was now eighteen, it was manifestly high time she came out; she might make her *début* at Lord Enniscorthy's ball. She might go with the Moores, and Miss Dopping herself would chaperone her, and provide her dress! Mrs. Redmond hesitated. Ought not Betty to come out under *her* wing?

"Not at all, my good creature," replied the other promptly. "You have your own chick to look after" ("and a pretty old chick too," she remarked inwardly). "I've known Betty long before you ever heard of her existence. She is my child. I owe her many a pleasant hour, and she shall owe some pleasant hours to me."

Miss Dopping was fully determined to carry her point, and when she took her leave, Mrs. Redmond had given her a promise to "see about it," and let her know before post time next day.

Now promising to "see about it," really meant consulting Belle. What would she say to Betty's coming out? Strange to say Belle bore the news surprisingly well! It was true that she was a little jealous of her cousin appearing with *eclat* in the suite of the Moores, for the Moores were great social magnates, and took but scant notice of Belle and her mother. (They were strangers in a county where it takes ten years at least to ingratiate yourself with the old residents.)

It was a triumphant fact that Lady Mary Moore had left cards at Noone, thanks to Miss Dopping's good offices, but a slight lowering of the eyelids was the only salutation she ever vouchsafed to Bel and the Dragon.

She had seen the former at a fancy ball, clothed in smiles and a little tulle, and had taken a prejudice against her on the spot—the prejudice of a prudent mother with two marriageable sons.

"Of course Betty must come out some time or other," thought Belle as she carefully considered the situation; and Miss Dopping and Maria Finny had been making disagreeable speeches about her costumes, and her occupations. For instance, Maria had said in her most aggressive manner: "I suppose your mother is making a fine purse for Betty! We all know she has two hundred a year of her own, and her dress and board cannot cost thirty; indeed she is as good as two servants—and saves that much."

"What a kind interest you take in our concerns!" returned Belle, with blazing eyes, and a quiver in her voice.

"I do," replied Maria with fearless frankness, "and it's your interest to know that every one in the place is talking of the shabby way that Betty is dressed; they say she wears your cast-off dresses, but I cannot believe *that*, for I've seen

you in things that I daren't offer to a beggar woman."

Belle had made a mental note of this conversation. It would never do to have people gossiping, or to be supposed to ill-use Betty, who was a popular favourite—that would be very bad policy; unpleasant hints might come to George's ears, and it was essential that he should only hear complimentary remarks about Noone. Betty, if she went to Roskeen, would be staying in his neighbourhood; possibly he would be at Roskeen itself! She would be able to report on his doings, and tell her if he was flirting with anyone! Unsophisticated Betty should be her spy in the land. Moreover the ball would be no expense. Miss Dopping had guaranteed that; her cousin could never be her rival, no matter how she was dressed! And after revolving all these matters in her mind, she came to the gracious conclusion that "Betty might go."

Happy Betty! who had never suspected that her fate was trembling in the balance, was all gay chatter and high spirits, as she and her adviser laid their heads together, to choose a gown from patterns, and Belle (who could be most generous and unselfish at other people's expense) selected a most *recherché* and elegant white ball dress, not forgetting such important details as shoes, and fan, and gloves. She even offered to endow her beaming relative with some of her own less becoming belongings.

"There's my grey dress would fit you, with very little alteration, and you can have my red bonnet if you like."

"No, no," returned Betty hastily, "I shall do very well; you know the Moores don't dress much, and I have my new serge, and my black lace for the evenings, and you can retrim my brown hat."

These two respectable frocks were the immediate

result of Maria Finny's warning ; her conversation (considerably watered down) had been repeated to Mrs. Redmond, with this insignificant issue.

"They do dress," repeated Belle, "and there is that little American heiress there. She is certain to be a swell. I wonder if she will set her cap at George Holroyd ; or Kathleen Moore may take his fancy ! Mind you write and let me know if he makes love to any of the girls over there. Now *promise* me this, Betty !" she urged impressively.

"But I am only going for a week," objected Betty, "and you will see him at the ball yourself."

"Well, at any rate promise to write and tell me all the news."

"I don't suppose there will be much news, but of course I shall write you if you wish, though I hate writing letters."

A few days later, Betty was driving down Ballingoole, seated beside Miss Dopping in the old green chariot ; they were on their way to Roskeen, a distance of fifteen miles.

Roskeen was a fine country place, kept up in suitable style, thanks to Lady Mary's comfortable fortune in the Three per Cents ; the shooting was well preserved, the stables were full, the house luxuriously furnished in a modern fashion. Soft Persian carpets covered the floors, velvet portières draped the doors, the walls were lined with fine paintings, there was a music-room, a billiard-room, a winter garden, and a French cook ! and there was never an instant's hesitation in people's minds about accepting an invitation to Roskeen. Betty faithfully fulfilled her promise. A few days after her departure, her anxious cousin received the following letter :—

"MY DEAR BELLE,—We arrived on Monday in time for dinner, and are the only people staying

here, besides Sir James and Lady Lucas, Mr. Holroyd and Miss Pink, the American girl; she is engaged to a cousin at home, and is going to be married when she has enough of travelling and seeing the world. She has been all round the globe once with her brother, and says she had a perfectly splendid time, and she feels as if she would like to go again. She is slight, plain, and dark, and plays and sings beautifully and talks a great deal; her tongue and fingers are always busy and she has the energy of half-a-dozen. I like her, so does everyone. We are very busy getting up *tableaux vivants*. Fred is at home on leave, and more conceited than ever. Miss Pink has taken him in hand. She told him to his face that she called him *very* ugly, and that one of his eyes was certainly larger than the other! Ghosty is almost quite well, but still wears his arm in a sling. I think Kathleen is much admired by Mr. Blake of Blakestown, at any rate he comes here nearly every day on some transparent excuse. We have had a good deal of rain, but we do not mind, for we play games, and have music, and billiards, and go for long walks when it clears, and in the evenings we dance. The ball is, as you know, on Tuesday. I am looking forward to it with great pleasure. My dress fits like a glove. I have tried it on, and it looks lovely. Flora Pink says that it is as well made as her Paris frocks, and she never saw anything so *cunning* as the cut of the sleeves! Miss Dopping is enjoying herself just as much as I am—in her own way. She and Granny Moore discuss old times for hours together. It seems so queer to hear them calling each other Sally and Polly. Katie is screaming for me to come and play hide-and-go-seek, so good-bye for the present.

"Your affectionate cousin,
"ELIZABETH REDMOND."

"Dancing and games, and hide-and-go-seek!" muttered Belle. "There is nothing like a few days in a country house for bringing people together, and promoting intimacy. Three days, above all three *wet* days, are better than a hundred balls. However there is luckily no one for George Holroyd to fall in love with. Katie is as good as engaged, the heiress is disposed of—and there is no one else!"

Strange as it may appear, she never cast a thought to Betty. Her remark about wet days in a country house was perfectly just. In those wet days, Betty was the life of Roskeen. She had known the Moores for years; they all—even Ghosty and Fred—called her by her Christian name; she was invariably gay, obliging, and good-tempered, ready for anything, from a game of fox and geese, to a drive on the box seat of Colonel Moore's drag. George Holroyd saw her now in a new light! A favoured guest, among luxurious surroundings, bright and pretty, and admired (*too* much admired to please him, for Ghosty followed her about like her shadow), Katie appealed to her opinion on every occasion, Lady Mary stroked her hair affectionately, and Flora Pink was loud in her praises, and said that she "just adored her."

"I do like you," said Flora, with a childlike frankness as they sat over the fire in Betty's room; "and shall I tell you something—some one likes you *better* than I do, and that's Mr. Holroyd. You see I know all the signs and tokens, for I have gotten a lover of my own."

"Nonsense, Flora, how can you be so silly!"

"Yes, I noticed how he looked at you, when you were dressed up in that splendid old brocade, with your hair powdered, the night of the tableaux, do you mind? And he is so jealous when you are talking to Ghosty; he is a perfectly lovely young

man—Great Scott! Betty! you needn't look so angry. Have some candy."

The evening of the dance came at last, and as George Holroyd leisurely descended the stairs, previous to taking his seat in the Moore's comfortable family omnibus, he noticed a charming figure flitting down before him—a girl in her ball dress! She paused to take one last fond look in the great glass on the first landing. It was Betty, beautified,—a fashionable young lady, in a misty, white gown, a pearl necklace, and long gloves. She carried a bouquet, too; now *who* had given her this bouquet? He approached softly on the Turkey carpet, and looking over her shoulder observed:

"*Most* satisfactory, is it not?"

"Oh!" blushing and turning round, "how you startled me, and I am quite nervous enough as it is."

"Really you must find that an entirely new sensation! Pray allow me to feel your pulse?"

"No, no, thank you," with a smile, "I am not quite so bad as that, but I have never been to any kind of dance—except the school breaking-up dances, and I have not an idea of what a ball will be like!" and she looked at him with bright, excited eyes.

"Shall I tell you?" he said, as they reached the great carpeted hall, with its two generous fireplaces, and seated themselves on a large Eastern divan. "A native syce, who had the good luck to obtain a peep of his master in a ball-room, was overheard describing his performances, something in this way—to a brother syce:

"'First he gallops her about, then he walks her slowly round to cool her, then he gives her water, then he gives her gram'—(that is to say, refreshments)—'then he goes and gallops some one else.'"

"I don't think many people will gallop *me*," said

Betty, laughing, "I know so few! But, at any rate, I shall not do like a friend of Miss Pink's. She goes and stays in the ladies' dressing-room, when she is not engaged—lest people should see her sitting out!"

"There is no fear that you will be driven to such a desperate expedient," returned George with twinkling eyes. "I hope you are going to give me the first waltz."

"No, I promised it to Fred a week ago. You *know* I did."

"The first dance, then," he urged, "even if it is a square. I am not proud."

She shook her head emphatically as she replied, "Ghosty bespoke that a year ago."

"Hang Ghosty! I am sorry I did not leave him at the bottom of that ditch! At any rate you will give me two waltzes, and the supper dance to begin with?"

"Yes, to begin with and end with. Miss Dopping says that in *her* day it was not correct to dance with any one more than twice."

"Minuets I presume! and as they took up best part of an hour, I am with her there. Here comes Fred, chortling to himself as he walks. Look at his beautiful shoes, and the gold buttons in his waistcoat."

"Hullo," he exclaimed, "down first; Betty, you are an early bird—we will not say anything about the worm," glancing at George. "What a ripping bouquet! Now I know what old Ghosty was fuming and fussing about, he got it over from Covent Garden."

"From Covent Garden," echoed the young lady, "when there are lovely flowers in the hot houses here."

"Yes, but it's more swagger to get 'em from town. Remember the first waltz is ours—we will show them how it *ought* to be done."

"Speak for yourself! I know I dance abominably. I only hope that I shall not make too humbling an exhibition of myself."

"At least you don't waltz as if you were going to sit down, nor cling to a fellow as if you were drowning," said Fred consolingly. "Here they come at last. Miss Pink, you are the pink of perfection. I guess you are going to give me 2, and 5 and 9."

"No, I expect you will have to guess again," said Miss Pink drily.

"Of course I know you are engaged. The knowledge has aged me by years."

"I wonder you ain't ashamed, Mr. Fred! I truly do. Your jokes throw a gloom over the whole place—why should you try to damp our little pleasure?"

By this time the hall was full—Lady Mary, in a blaze of family diamonds, Colonel Moore in a sad dejected state of mind, Miss Dopping in black velvet, with magnificent Mechlin lace—who would suppose this somewhat stately old lady to be the self-same Sally, who wore a poke bonnet, short woollen skirts, and was followed in her walks by a train of hungry beggars, instead of these yards of the finest Genoa pile? The party from Roskeen, drove over to Lord Enniscorthy's seat, the scene of the festivity, in a comfortable, well warmed private omnibus. Flora Pink, Kathleen, and Fred, kept the ball of conversation rolling, but Betty was too nervous, and too full of delightful anticipations to talk much. How her heart beat, as they drove under the grand entrance porch, and stepped out upon red cloth! Ghosty Moore gave her his sound arm, and a programme, in another moment she was among the crowd of strange faces—and presented to Lady Enniscorthy, a stout elderly woman, with a large nose, who smiled on her

graciously, and then they passed on into the ball-room. She danced the first lancers with Ghosty, and this gave her time to compose herself, look about her, and regain her self-possession. Several pairs of eyes were fixed on her, and people asked: "Who was the pretty, tall girl who had come with the Moores?" To hear that "she was nobody in particular, only Mrs. Redmond's niece," was rather a disappointment. After the dance, Betty and her partner walked about and recognised their acquaintances—the Malones for instance, who seized on Betty as upon a long lost friend—Mrs. Malone looking flushed and nervous, in a new black brocade, the Major pompous and talkative, Denis in gloves much too large, and shoes much too small, holding his nose high in the air, and affecting to look down upon the whole thing.

Then there were the Finnys, in a retired nook, which commanded a good view—Mrs. Finny pitifully abject, Maria grim and defiant, hardly knowing a soul in the room, save by sight.

Here the sensible reader will naturally ask, "Why did they come?" They came to protest their gentility; their right to be classed among the "county" gentry, and more particularly, Mrs. Finny came, because Maria made her—and Maria came, because the scene gave her food for discourse for the next twelve months. She enjoyed the delights of sitting in Jane Bolland's back parlour, and vivisectioning the present gay and unsuspecting company. The Major was in his element, and in considerable request among luckless elderly spinsters, whom he made happy by his attentions—by giving them one dance, so that they could say, "Oh, dear me, yes it was a capital floor. I danced of course." He took starving dowagers into the refreshment room, and quite a convoy of old ladies (of position) down to supper; whilst

Mrs. Malone watched her son (her eldest son) with proud and eager eyes, and pointed him out with undisguised triumph to her immediate neighbours : "That's my son George, coming this way now with Lady Armine Fitzmaurice," or "that is my eldest son, dancing with Betty Redmond." It was agreed—even by Maria Finny—that Betty looked well, was one of the prettiest girls in the room—in short that she was a great credit to Ballingooole. She was in enviable request, surrounded by would-be partners, and Fred—who had not been quite certain as to how she would "take"—now pestered her for half the dances on her programme, and advertised his intimacy by calling her "Betty" across a set of lancers. George did not mind *him*, but he was really jealous of Ghosty. An innocent hunting friend had pointed him out to him, as "Booked for pretty Betty Redmond. It was true she had next to no fortune, but the Moores all liked her, and it was a settled thing." His waltz with Betty came at last ; it was only number five, so the evening was not so very far advanced, but for him, it was only just about to begin.

"I did not know that the Major danced," he exclaimed, as he watched his step-father revolving round the room like a big humming top.

"Yes—he is very fond of balls," replied Betty, "and, until lately, he wore his full dress tunic on every possible occasion, until it was agony to him, and he said he could not put the tip of his finger inside his waist-belt ; now he is at a loss to know what to do with his uniform. What can you suggest ?"

"He might stuff it, and set it up in his study, as an effigy of himself," returned George shortly. "Our next dance is number twelve is it not ? May I see your card ?"

"Yes, of course."

"You are dancing the next with Denis. What sort of a performer is he?"

"Well," smiling, "I may tell you in confidence, that Fred Moore says in a small room he is dangerous, but he will have lots of scope here."

"Why do you not give him a square?" expostulated his step-brother.

"I offered him a square—I begged of him, almost with tears in my eyes, but he would not hear of it; as it is, he is offended; 'out' with me, as they say."

"Although you have agreed to sacrifice yourself?" returned George as he led her into a passage. "He deserves to be put to death to slow music."

In this passage they came face to face with Mrs. Redmond and Belle. Belle in a yellow gown, was looking quite her best; a slight *souffçon* of rouge set off her dark eyes—eyes that sparkled with unusual brilliancy.

"Oh, Betty, so there you are!" accosting her, with much animation. "And Mr. Holroyd! We have only just arrived; we had Casey's covered car, and it *is* so slow! I know scarcely any one here, Mr. Holroyd; so I have put you down for three waltzes and an extra," holding out her programme playfully. "Now you must leave Betty to talk to mother, and to tell her all she has been doing, and *who* gave her that lovely bouquet, and take poor me round the rooms." And before George could realize the fact, she had walked him away, with her neatly gloved hand on his arm, leaving Betty in her own place—yes Belle was undoubtedly a clever girl. It would have fared ill with Betty, had not Ghosty Moore (with the eye of love) discovered her—for Mrs. Redmond had towed her off to the white drawing-room—the haunt of dowagers only—and there she seated herself on a sofa beside her victim, and proceeded to cross-examine her, whilst at the same time she en-

deavoured to "catch the eye" and recognition of various haughty, high-fed old ladies. As long as Belle was enjoying herself, what did it matter about Betty? And *she* did not choose to sit alone; by and bye she hoped to figuratively harpoon a substantial county magnate, who would take her down to supper, but she was certainly not going to herd with the Finneys and Malones! However her young kinswoman was speedily carried off by an eligible young man, to take part in the ensuing waltz, and she was left to the tender mercies of Maria Finny, who had just discovered her—and who perceiving that the old lady wished to ignore her acquaintance as much as possible, attached herself to her like a social "burr"—for the remainder of the evening!

Betty watched Belle, and her partner, floating round; they were admirable dancers both. What a pretty figure Belle had, and how wonderfully long-winded she must be, for her lips were moving incessantly. She talked as it were into her partner's ear the whole time she was dancing, and as she subsequently walked about with him, in conspicuous companionship, her vivacity, her sparkling dark beauty, and smart ball dress, made her the cynosure of many eyes. Mr. Holroyd danced once more with Betty, the dance before supper. He had been, *he* thought, rather clever about this, as he led her, when it was over, into a little boudoir; there was no one in it but themselves. Now was his opportunity! Now he would put his fate in her hands. He stood on the hearth rug, and leant his elbow firmly on the chimney-piece—but in spite of that, his arm shook; whilst she fanned herself slowly with her new white feather fan, and gazed into the fire.

"I hope you did not mind my leaving you that time," he began nervously.

"Not at all," she returned looking up at him; "why should I? Of course it was quite natural that you should go with Belle."

"You think it quite natural that I should leave you for her?"

"Yes, of course I do," she answered with a little nod and smile, but her pulses were throbbing fast.

"Then you are mistaken, Betty," he said leaning towards her. "If I had my own way I would never leave *you* as long as I——"

"Here she is! the very girl I want!" exclaimed Fred Moore, pushing back the portière.

George turned and looked at him. At this moment he had never seen anyone he disliked as much as Fred, with his round fair head, pink shiny face, comfortable little figure, gold buttons, and grin.

"Come along, Bet, you are engaged to me; come along," he called out masterfully. "I am going to take you in to supper. Why, Betty"—scanning her curiously—"what's this; you are as red as a rose; you are actually blushing. I never saw you blush before. Betty, you have performed a *feat*!"

"I—I—How can you be so silly," she stammered. "I don't want any supper, but if you like I'll go with you and look on."

"Nonsense; you need not be showing off before Holroyd. You have as fine an appetite as any girl I know; Holroyd, you come along too—you *may*. We will get to a little table by ourselves, and do a good business with oysters, and truffled boar's head, and champagne—you could not be in better hands than mine—and that's sound."

Perhaps George would have accepted this invitation to the unpopular post of "third" party, but for Belle, who entered with a partner at this moment, and said with an air of playful proprietorship:

"Oh, Mr. Holroyd, this *is* most fortunate! I

know I can depend upon *you* to look after poor mamma—here she is—she says she is quite faint with hunger."

Mrs. Redmond—who had at last shaken off Maria—was in a bland and chatty frame of mind, although intensely occupied with various toothsome comestibles—soup, salmon, ducklings, pate de foie gras, all of which received her very best attention. She remained a long time in the supper room—with George, so to speak, chained to the stake, and never noticed how silent and preoccupied he was; how often his eyes wandered to a little table, at which sat Betty, Miss Pink, and the brothers Moore, nor how restless he became, after they had risen and departed. Lady Mary was a fussy chaperon, and by the time Mr. Holroyd and his charge had returned to the ball room, she and her young ladies were nowhere to be seen—they had gone home!

Poor George! He had never wished Mrs. Redmond at Jericho! Never!

CHAPTER XII.

"FOXY JOE TELLS TALES."

"For every inch that is not a fool is a rogue,"

—DRYDEN.

MISS PINK, who was in the highest spirits, followed Betty into her bed-room, when they arrived home from the ball, and offered to unlace her dress, if Betty would do the same kind office for her.

"You looked perfectly beautiful," she exclaimed, kissing her, "and did you not have a lovely time. Oh, *my!*"

Betty agreed that she had had a lovely time, and when, after an hour's thorough discussion of the events of the evening, she had got rid of her

vivacious companion, she wrapped herself in a shawl, and put out the candles, and went and sat in a deep window seat, to watch for the dawn, and to think. Never before had Betty's thoughts kept her out of bed.

She was not the same gay careless Betty that we had figuratively handed into the old green chariot a week ago. No, her little simple heart now beat with delicious dazzling hopes and then fluttered with dismal dreadful fears. She had made a discovery; she found that she was continually thinking of George Holroyd, and that she liked him. Not as she liked Denis Malone, and Fred and Ghosty Moore. No, quite differently. She had a guilty knowledge that she never was so happy as when he was talking to her, and that when he was not present she was continually and secretly watching the door. Alas! poor Betty, this latter is a truly fatal symptom.

Miss Dopping was a lady who never allowed anything to interfere with her plans. When she fixed an hour for her arrival or departure, nothing less than an earthquake could alter her arrangements. At ten o'clock, the morning after the dance, she and her *protégé* were trotting smartly down the Roskeen avenue, behind a pair of posters, *en route* home. Strange to say, Mr. Holroyd made a pretext for returning to Ballingooole the following day, although pressed to remain for a most tempting meet. When he had taken his leave, Fred Moore imparted some of his ideas to his brother, over a quiet cigar in the smoking-room.

"I tell you what Ghosty, that chap Holroyd is head over ears in love with Betty Redmond."

"Not he," returned his brother, contemptuously. "It's Belle you are thinking of; did you not see him dancing with her, and towing the mother in to supper? What an old woman she is; she

reminds me of a walrus shuffling about in black satin."

"Belle asked Holroyd to dance. She has brass enough for anything, and *she* told him off to her mother."

"He is always at Noone," persisted Ghosty, "and every one says that he is after Belle; why, Betty is a mere child; it was only the other day she went into long dresses."

"Child or not, when I went into the oak room the night of the ball, I started a fine covey, or I'm greatly mistaken. He was leaning towards her, speaking as if his life and soul depended on her answer, and her face was as red as fire. She ate no supper, not even lobster salad, and strawberry ice! That's a very bad sign in a girl."

But to all this his brother Augustus turned a scornful face, and a deaf ear.

* * * * *

Foxy Joe was no friend to Denis Malone. Denis laughed at him openly, and made a butt of him at Nolan's, and Foxy Joe was fully resolved "to have it in for him," as he expressed it, "*yet*," although he carried his messages meanwhile, and took his money; for that matter he took every one's messages, from dainty little pink notes from Noone, to a couple of pound of steak for Mrs. Maccabe. She was his most constant patroness, and he saw a good deal of her, and her niece and book-keeper, pretty Lizzie, who looked *so* demure, as she sat behind a kind of railed-in desk, peering through the bars, with her bright dark eyes, and shovelling out greasy coppers, with her lady-like white fingers.

"A good girl," said her aunt in confidence to Jane Bolland (consequently in confidence to the town), "with a great head for figures, and worth her weight in gold, and though I'm against cousins marrying, if she and Dan were to set up together,

it would not be a bad thing, and she might drop into *my* shoes!" Ridiculous idea! as if coquettish Lizzie, with her smart dresses and high heels, would ever harangue her customers in a black poke bonnet, much less wield the ox tail with a vigorous arm, and personally visit the slaughter yard!

No! Lizzie in her heart loathed the business; she was rather romantic, and there was no poetry about a butcher's shop, and ribs and briskets. Yes, Lizzie was decidedly romantic, and it was passing sweet to her, to meet a young gentleman, by stealth, heir to a good old name and property (Heaven help your innocence, Lizzie!) and to walk along lonely lanes, with her head on his shoulder, and his arm round her waist; she was exceedingly sly, cautious and clever to have kept her secret for a whole year from lynx-eyed Ballingoole. Poor Ballingoole! that was so badly in want of some new topic of conversation. She frequently sent and received notes, placing them under a certain stone, on a certain wall, that was her private post office. Latterly Lizzie had grown bolder, and during a visit to Dublin, she and Denis had had the audacity to go to the theatre, and to the circus in company, and to take a Sunday stroll on Kingstown pier; and so far they were undiscovered. The evening after Betty had returned home, from ease, and idleness, and play, to economy, and more economy and work, she went for a long walk up what was called "the bog road," to give the dogs a run. This was their favourite direction; the cabins were few and far between, and contained a fair supply of active cats and not too many furious, ferocious lurchers, only too ready to rush out and attack three peaceable, gentlemanlike little white dogs. On her way home, in a lane not far from Bridgetstown, Betty saw two figures standing near the

hedge. At first she scarcely noticed them, but on nearer approach, she perceived that they were lovers—a man—a *gentleman*—and a girl; the girl's hand was on his shoulder, and she seemed to be speaking to him eagerly, he replying with expressive nods, and then he suddenly raised her face by the chin, kissed her hastily, and disappeared through an adjacent gap.

They were totally unconscious of a spectator, and as the girl turned back, she came almost face to face with Betty—the girl was Lizzie Maccabe.

"Good evening, Miss," she said in some confusion.

"Lizzie, who was that you were speaking to?" enquired the young lady, in a tone of austere displeasure.

"Indeed, Miss Elisabeth, it was just a friend."

"I could see *that*, but who was it?"

"Well, then, indeed Miss Elisabeth, I don't see what right you have to ask."

"The same right as I would have to try and put you out, if I saw your clothes on fire, or to throw you a rope if you were drowning. You were walking with a gentleman, Lizzie."

"And if I was, miss?" returned Lizzie, flippantly, "sure the road is not mine!"

"If you won't tell *me*, I shall speak to your aunt; she had better look after you."

"Oh, she knows I am very well able to take care of myself," returned the other pertly, "and since you are so anxious to know, I may as well tell you, that the gentleman was just Mr. Holroyd."

"Mr. Holroyd," gasped Betty, who had been almost certain that she had recognised Denis.

"Yes," continued Lizzie, who lied boldly and well, "why not him as well as another? He means no harm, nor do I; a girl must have a bit of fun, as well as young ladies."

"He kissed you, Lizzie," said Betty tragically.

"Well, miss, and if he did, you need not pick me eyes out! We tradespeople are not so particular as the quality; he gives me a gold locket, and I give him a kiss, where's the harm?"

"There is great harm, Lizzie; you are not the girl I took you for."

"Maybe then, miss, if you were to look at *home* you would not be so shocked at your neighbours. Maybe there's a worse than *me*—maybe there's a young lady as Mr. Holroyd can kiss for the asking."

"I have known you for years, Lizzie, and you and I were in the same class in Sunday school; rude as you are, I cannot forget that. Promise me that you will give up meeting Mr. Holroyd, and I will keep what I have seen to myself."

"Well then, miss," after a moment's hesitation, and with a curious smile, "I don't mind if I do give up meeting Mr. Holroyd, just to oblige *you*. I am not so dead set upon him as some people, and Ballingooole is a shocking place for gossip. And as for Jane Bolland, I wonder the ground does not crack under her! I must be going now, Miss Elisabeth, and so I will wish you good evening," and she flounced off, tossing her head and swinging her parasol as she went.

Betty walked home very, very slowly; she was more unhappy than she had ever been in all her life; her illusions were dispelled; her little demi-god had fallen from his pedestal, and lay shattered in the dust. A man who could court a pert, vulgar girl like Lizzie Maccabe, was not worth a second thought, nor would he be likely to think of her, but as an unsophisticated country mouse, with whom he could flirt and amuse himself.

Her heart was unusually sore, and she was both silent and depressed, as she took her place at her aunt's scantily-spread board. Various sayings of George's came back to her now, with an entirely

new interpretation! He had once told her that he thought "Elisabeth" the most beautiful name in the world, and that it exactly suited *her*, doubtless he thought that it suited Lizzie Maccabe still better! When Mr. Holroyd came over the next afternoon, ostensibly to talk about the ball—in reality to steal (if possible) a few moments with Betty—lo!—she was an ice maiden! His eager greetings, his anxious efforts to continue where he had left off, were cruelly repudiated, and silenced. What was the reason of her cold, altered manner?

He could not imagine what had happened to pretty, smiling Betty within forty-eight hours. Who was this freezingly polite, this pale, and rather silent young lady; not Betty surely?

Oh no, this was a member of the family he had never met before; this was Miss Elisabeth Redmond.

As Lizzie tripped home, giggling at her own cleverness, and at the recollection of Betty's stern, shocked face, she little knew that a Nemesis was on her track, in the shape of Foxy Joe!

Foxy Joe went further afield than most people; he saw a good deal, he made excellent use of his cunning eyes and capacious ears, and he did not deserve his name for nothing. Denis had recently placed figuratively the last straw on the camel's back and Joey, screaming with passion, his face grey with fury, had sworn a frightful oath that he would pay him out *soon*. And Denis had laughed derisively! Would Denis laugh if he knew that Joey had witnessed more than one stolen interview, that he had appropriated more than one note, and that even now *he* was sniggering in his sleeve as he followed Lizzie home? Lizzie halted in the town, and had a long and interesting gossip with her bosom friend, the dressmaker, whilst Joey slipped down the street, and walked into Mrs.

Maccabe's establishment. Mrs. Maccabe was reading the *Freeman's Journal* by the light of a lamp in the front shop, and glowered at Joey and his empty basket, over her horn spectacles.

"Ye left it?" she enquired curtly.

"Be Gob I did."

"And brought no word about beef for corning?"

"Devil a word," scratching his head, "I handed in the basket, and passed no remark."

"That's strange! for mostly ye have as much jaw as a sheep's head," sneered his employer. "And what *kept* you?"

"Faix—I was just watching Miss Lizzie."

"For what? What was she doing? She went to confession at four o'clock."

"Confession, how are ye? And did she tell ye *who* confesses her?" And he looked under his eyebrows, with an unpleasant expression.

"Father Connell, you unfortunate natural, and who else?"

"No—but Father Denis Malone; I saw him confessing her, and sluthering and kissing her, in the lane by the horse park, not twenty minutes ago."

Mrs. Maccabe rose hastily, and felt round for the ox-tail. Many a time it had descended heavily on the dwarf's shrinking shoulders.

"Joey! I'll give you a lathering that you'll remember to your dying day," advancing between him and the door. "How *dar* you tell your black lies on a respectable girl like Lizzie."

"Before the mother of God, and all the blessed saints, I swear I saw her," howled Joey, holding a chair between himself and the virago, and trembling in every limb; but the thought of Denis spurred his flagging courage, and he added, "Sure Miss Betty saw them *too*, and hasn't it been going on this year or more!

"Ye little lying baste! ' she screamed, swinging

the tail, and bringing it down with a resounding whack. "Take that, and that, and *that*."

"Oh! Mrs. Maccabe, mam! Oh! holy Moses! Oh! well maybe ye can read their writing," and out of a very greasy pocket he unearthed three letters—one from Denis, and two in the handwriting of the fair Lizzie, written (were further proof required) on bill paper, with a little picture of a fat ox surmounted by "Bridget Maccabe and Sons, Butchers and Salesmen."

Mrs. Maccabe became yellow (white she could never be), staggered over to the table, laid her weapon down at her right hand, and slowly perused the letter, whilst Joey, armed with a shield, in the shape of a large round basket, watched her narrowly, with his little sly grey eyes.

"If this is *true*, Foxy Joe," she said at last, removing her horn spectacles, with shaking fingers, "ye had better take the hatchet and choppers out of me reach. I don't want a murder on me soul! for I believe I could kill her. Her that was a pattern in the convent, and that talked of a vocation, and of taking the black veil! Her that can scarcely lift her eyes to a man and that comes of dacent people—her that no one has ever been able to say a word against, and *me* that has always kept myself so distant, and so high, and that has always been respected. Oh! oh! oh——!" and sight never seen before! sight that dilated Joey's narrow eyes, Mrs. Maccabe threw her blue checked apron over her head, for once in her life gave way to her feelings, and lifted up her voice and wept.

This strange paroxysm was of brief duration; she presently dried her eyes, and retreated into her inner parlour, with the letters and the lamp, leaving Joey alone in the dark shop.

An instant later, Lizzie came in, pink-cheeked,

brisk, and smiling, and, unaware of her danger, walked straight into the lion's mouth.

"What's this I am afther hearing about you, Lizzie Maccabe?" enquired her aunt in a strangely forced voice.

"I am sure I don't know!" returned Lizzie, tossing her head, but her face became the colour of ashes, as her eyes fell upon the letters.

"Is it true?" demanded the elder woman hoarsely.

"What?" stammered the culprit.

"That you write letters to that blackguard, Denis Malone, and meet him after dark, and kiss him."

Lizzie glanced appealingly at Joey, who leant against the wall and nodded his head, and looked at her with a grin of satisfied malice; there was no hope from Joey!

"Yes, it's true," she answered in a whisper.

"Then my house is no place for the likes of you," said Bridget Maccabe, rising with an air that would have done credit to Sarah Siddons. "There's the door; out you go!"

"Oh, aunt, aunt, you don't mean it?"

"Come!" taking her roughly by the arm, "I'll never see your brazen face again."

"Oh Aunt Bridget!" cried the wretched girl, falling on the floor, and clasping her by the knees. "Don't be so angry with me. Sure I would have told you long ago; only he would not let me. Sure we—we are married."

"Ye are what? Get up off the floor, ye shameless hussey."

"Married," sobbed Lizzie, "married at a registry office in Dublin last year. Sure haven't I my ring, and all the papers at the bottom of the little tin cash-box along with your bank book."

"Then sit there on that chair, where I can see you, that I may have a good look at the biggest

fool that ever drew the breath of life," and Mrs. Maccabe moved back a few steps, and gazed at her weeping niece, with her arms akimbo.

"Lizzie, you are a wicked, low girl—deceiving them that was good to ye. What will Father Connell say, and the Reverend Mother, and (as an after-thought) the Malones?"

"I don't care what they say," rejoined Lizzie, plucking up a little spirit. "I am Mrs. Denis Malone, and as good as the best, and Denis is the only son and heir."

"Heir, indeed!" shouted her aunt, "and what are you going to live on, if I may make bold to ask?"

"The Major——" began Lizzie.

"The Major can't keep himself—let alone a son and a daughter-in-law. Why *I'm* keeping the Major! Well, well, to think of it! First and foremost you will bring down your marriage lines to Father Connell, and then we will get you decently married in chapel, and then we will see how your husband is going to support you; for mind one thing, my good girl, you won't live here; it would ill become the wife of the *heir* of the Malones, to be chopping mate at her aunt's the butcher. Aye and maybe cutting off the best loin chops for her lady mother-in-law."

"Maybe the Malones will take us in."

"Oh, keep your may bees for honey, and talk sense. I think I see the Major arming you in to dinner; if he does, maybe you'll remind him of my bill. I think I see Mrs. Malone and Miss Betty making free with the likes of ye——"

"Miss Betty! I saw Miss Betty this evening—she—she—she," and here Mrs. Denis Malone, frightened and overwrought, suddenly went off into a fit of screaming hysterics, that were quite as protracted and alarming as if she had been born a lady.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. MACCABE HAS IT OUT WITH THE MAJOR.

"He is a fool who thinks, by force or skill,
To turn the current of a woman's will."

—S. TUKE.

THE following morning, when the first press of business was over, and when she had taken counsel with her sons, and had locked Lizzie into her room, Mrs. Maccabe put on her shawl (she always wore her bonnet except in bed) and stalked up the street, and out to Bridgetstown. She had never visited it before, and her tall commanding figure in the doorway, gave Sara, the parlour maid, what she subsequently described as a "turn." Doubtless she gave Mrs. Malone a turn also, for she firmly believed that she had come for the balance of her bill—a large balance—and tremulously hinted as much.

"Oh no, Mrs. Malone, ma'm ; though in course I'll be thankful to see my money. I've come about something a great deal worse nor that. To make a long story short, your son Denis has destroyed himself."

"Denis," shrieked the wretched woman, staggering back against the turf basket. "What is it? Tell me the worst at once! Is he dead? Oh! what, what has happened to him?"

"He has happened to get married to my niece, Lizzie Maccabe, at a registry office in Dublin last October *that's* what's happened to him!"

For a moment Mrs. Malone was speechless; then she went and sat down very suddenly on the nearest chair, and put both her hands to her head.

"It's gospel truth," continued her visitor. "I

only found it out last night. I'm sorry for you, and I'm sorry for meself: it's a terrible disgrace to us both. Such a thing never happened to a Maccabe before. I am going to get shut of her at wance."

"Denis must have been mad," said his mother distractedly. "Are you sure he is married?"

Mrs. Maccabe's brow now became clothed in thunder.

"Better be mad nor bad, nor worse than he is! He *is* married. I have the lines, and I've come up to talk the matter over with the Major, and to see what he will do for his son's wife. He must take her out of *my* house."

"Oh, Mrs. Maccabe, could you not keep it quiet for a little longer, till we think it over. I simply dare not tell his father," said Mrs. Malone piteously.

"But I dar," replied this heroic matron, standing squarely before her meek little customer. "I dar a regiment of the likes of him; and I'll tell him within the next five minutes. Where's the study?"

"Oh, give me time a little time," pleaded Mrs. Malone in tears, "till I consult my eldest son. Oh, there he is! George, come here."

George, who was equipped for riding, entered, whip in hand, and stared in amazement at his weeping mother, and the butcher's widow. A bill of course.

"It's something awful about Denis—and Mrs. Macoabe's niece. He has married her, and she has been his wife for months," explained his mother with streaming eyes.

George could not restrain a low whistle.

"It was only discovered yesterday, and Mrs. Maccabe is going to tell his father, and don't *you* agree with me, that we might wait a little, and think it over."

"No, mother, Mrs. Maccabe is right," returned her son with decision; "there must be no delay;

he should be told at once, and the marriage openly acknowledged."

"You are right, sir," said Mrs. Maccabe approvingly, "and now I'll not detain you longer, ma'm, if you will show me the road to the Major's study."

"I'll go with you," volunteered George gallantly, resolved that the butcher's widow should not bear the brunt of the fray alone and unprotected. Mrs. Malone was helpless. She stood with her handkerchief to her mouth, and watched them go into the study, saw them close the door, and then rushed back, and buried her head among the sofa cushions, poor coward! The study was next to the drawing-room, and at first there was the steady humming sound of Mrs. Maccabe's voice, then a roar from the Major, then George spoke, then roar upon roar, like a starving Bengal tiger who sees food.

The Major could not realise the truth at first. He pushed back his chair, thereby capsizing Boozle, who was sleeping comfortably in the paper basket on all the unpaid bills. He gasped, his face became the colour of a boiled beetroot.

"Eh? What? What?" he shouted, and then he rose and figuratively fell upon Mrs. Maccabe, for "a lying, thieving, scheming old harridan, who had ruined his innocent son—an infernal old fothooke, who had made the match."

"And what would I get, av you please?" drawing herself up with an air of superb enquiry. "For why would I marry me niece, a decent girl, to an idle, drunken scutt, that never earned six-pence, a low-minded rascalion, heir to nothing but debt and his father's bad name? A fine thing to tell Bridget Maccabe——" and she looked about her, as if in search of the oxtail.

In vain the Major stormed; here his bellowing and bullying was as water on a rock. To borrow

a word from the intrepid widow, she "bested him," as she subsequently boasted—cowed him, silenced him, yea even him.

George was scarcely able to get in one syllable between such a war of words, and two such champions. It was Greek meeting Greek with a vengeance. The Major assumed an attitude of ferocious antagonism that would have struck terror into the heart of a less valiant opponent, and the battle raged. At last there was a lull, the man was worn down by the woman's vigorous eloquence, and Mrs. Maccabe calmly stated her ultimatum.

"The girl should be decently married, as soon as possible, before the priest, and before the Rev. Mr. Mahon, too, if they liked, and Denis Malone should take his wife home. If he passed the medical, he might get something to do."

"But he has *not* passed," bawled the Major. "I've heard by yesterday's post he has failed for his final examination, and he is done for. The most I'll do for him will be to give him a steerage passage to Australia, and a five-pound note."

"Man, that's all balderdash and nonsense!"—that the Major should live to be apostrophised as a mere "man"! "Ye can't turn your only son out into the world as ye would an ass on a bog, and him with a wife on his hands—ye bid to provide for him," responded the widow in a tone of unshaken resolve.

"Denis might make a good start in Australia," ventured his step-brother. "You see he likes a country life: he rides well, and he knows a little about stock, and if he had a small share in a run, just a start, he might do very well."

"Then will *you* start him?" enquired the Major, turning on him furiously, forgetting the recent plunge he had made into George's pocket.

"I am quite unable to do anything at present,"

"Av *course* the Major will assist his only son. It's not your place, sir," said Mrs. Maccabe emphatically. "The Major will give at least five hundred pounds, and their passages and outfit, and do the thing respectably, when he is about it," speaking precisely as if the Major were miles away.

He, with his eyes starting out of his head, assured her in forcible language (that cannot here be quoted) that he would not do anything of the sort. But this determined woman made him listen to what she called "reason"; she bargained and chaffered with him, as if she were buying a young stall-fed bullock, and when she had left the study, rather hoarse and breathless, she had gained her end.

The Major would give four hundred pounds down on the nail; she herself (poor woman as she was) would put down two more. This money to be lodged in the hands of a respectable, honest man in Melbourne, who would see that Denis did not make ducks and drakes of it, but invest it prudently. The couple were to be married as soon as possible, and to take ship to Australia. "She would pay her niece's passage second class, and give her a sensible outfit, and no one could say but that she had done a handsome thing for a desolate, lorn widow woman, with no one to earn for her but herself, and hard work, and small returns, and *bad* debts. She would not trouble the Major further at present, but may be he would spake a word to Mr. Denis and tell him that he was not to go next or nigh Bridget Maccabe, as she would not be answerable for herself."

"Spake a word to Mr. Denis," but feebly expresses the scene that awaited that young gentleman, as he strolled into the house in time for dinner. He had given the governor a wide berth since the fatal letter had been received the previous

day, and had spent his time most agreeably, in coursing and card playing with some of his boon companions. He had a phlegmatic nature, and an adjustable conscience: it was rather a bore that he had not passed, but he hated the profession, and for the present his mother had assured him that he could live at home, and they would "think it over." He was certain to get something, some agency; he was only twenty-four; there was lots of time! The Major's fury would blow itself out like a gale, so he flattered himself, as he prepared for dinner. A sharp knock at the door, and enter Cuckoo, pale and excited-looking, and evidently bursting with some great news.

"Now then," said Denis, who was belabouring his thick stiff hair with a brush in either hand, "what's up?"

"Everything is up!" returned his sister tragically. "I thought I would just come in and warn you. Mrs. Maccabe was here this morning; they know you are married to Lizzie."

Here Denis let fall a hair brush with a clang.

"It's not true, is it Denis?—that common girl! I've seen her walking with the Police Sergeant, over and over again—and I am sure she greases her hair with suet."

"Who told?" enquired Denis fiercely, "and how did it come out?"

"From all I can hear, it was Foxy Joe that told."

"Foxy Joe! Then I'll break every bone in his crooked body."

"The Major is raging mad, Denis. I never saw him so bad, and mother has been crying all day. You and Lizzie are to be married in chapel, and to be packed off to Australia. Mrs. Maccabe will help to send you; that's all I could get out of George."

This programme was acceptable to Denis; he

was sick of Bridgetstown ; he would gladly go forth and see the world, and begin a new life. Visions of a free, novel, thoroughly untrammelled existence, where he could play cards whenever he pleased, and with whom he pleased, and gallop over miles of good going, on a well bred waler, instantly rose before his mind's eye (an eye that kept a sharp look out on its own interest). After all, "Lizzie's row," as he called it, was bound to come some day ; best have the two rows together, he said to himself, philosophically ; the row about his exam., and the row about his wife : as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb ; and he descended, with a certain amount of dogged courage, to face the storm !

A storm, indeed ! A typhoon, that raged in the latitude of Bridgetstown for ten whole days. During occasional lulls, Denis was married in chapel and in church, passages were taken, money paid in, letters written, outfits procured.

The news of Denis Malone's match ran through the neighbourhood like wild fire, and people said that "he would never do a day's good at home ; he was well out of the country, and that for *once* the Major showed some sense." Here the Major got credit for wisdom that was not his own ; his share of the money he had raised by giving a bill on the furniture at Bridgetstown, and he was so furious with his son that he actually thought him a cheap riddance at the price.

But Denis's mother was heartbroken : she wept, she implored, she even went on her knees to her husband for her poor dear boy. She abased herself before Mrs. Maccabe (who was now a connection), and it was all of no avail ; that great woman was inexorable, and the bitterest drop in all her cup was the knowledge that Denis, her darling, was *glad* to go.

In intervals of pleading and weeping, she prepared his shirts and clothes, and packed up some portion of the household linen and (but this is in strict confidence) some of the Major's silk socks and handkerchiefs, his second best top coat, a rarely remembered gold watch, and a dozen silver forks and spoons, also the pink topazes for Lizzie—or it might be another relative. A few came forward with presents for the young couple. George gave his brother a saddle and bridle, and a gun. Mrs. Finny presented him with an old case of surgical instruments. Maria gave him a piece of her mind. Miss Dopping gave Lizzie a first rate sewing machine, and a long lecture, concluding with this pleasant little prophecy :

"If you come to want, and to earn your bread, Lizzie Malone, as I honestly believe you will ; this machine, if you work it industriously, will keep you from actual starvation. You will have to support your husband too—unless you can keep him away from cards, and whisky."

"I think I'll be able to do that, ma'am," returned young Mrs. Malone confidently ; "and if the worst comes to the worst, I can always make my living as a cashier in a shop. I am very fond of Denis, but I'll never earn *his* bread."

In which sentiment Lizzie displayed a flash of her aunt's high spirit. Betty Redmond presented Lizzie with a warm shawl for the voyage, Belle gave her her photograph, and Mrs. Redmond, with much pomp, presented her with a case of needles (marked two shillings). Thus, endowed with gifts and advice, the young couple set out to seek their fortune in the new world. Major Malone personally conducted them down to Queenstown, saw them on board the steamer (in case they should miss it), and waved them away from the shores of old Ireland, with his best red silk pocket handkerchief.

The news about Denis Malone fell like a thunderbolt at Noone. Juggy brought up the intelligence from the gate lodge to the kitchen, and from the kitchen it flew upstairs. Mrs. Redmond wagged her head, and cast up her eyes, and said "that, after *that*, nothing would surprise her." Belle laughed maliciously: she was glad of a bit of excitement. She was delighted that Denis was in trouble and going to "get the sack," for she knew that he bore her no good will, and might possibly interfere with her prospect; and Betty, who was deeply relieved, was both glad and sorry. She had been almost rude to Mr. Holroyd—thanks to Lizzie's daring falsehood; and how was she to excuse herself? How could she explain that she had mistaken him for Denis? She must make amends for her blunder at the first opportunity; but this opportunity never occurred. An urgent, nay an angry invitation, summoned him to stay with his Uncle Godfrey. When he came over to make his adieux at Noone, he found all the ladies at home. Betty was herself again, and her bright face was all smiles. But it was now *his* turn to be cold and irresponsible. He did not understand nor respect a girl who could change like a weathercock. She would be an uncomfortable sort of wife; if she meant to have accepted him, she must have known what was trembling on his lips that night at Lord Enniscorthy's ball, and her manner, when they next met, had been intended to show him unmistakably that she did not wish to hear what he had to say—and he would now be for ever silent. He was glad to go away from her neighbourhood, to where, among new scenes, he might forget her. He was glad to leave that miserable home, where a weeping mother, an irascible stepfather, an intolerable brother, had recently made him their confidante, go-between and victim.

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"Yes," in answer to Belle's pathetic enquiries. "He was coming back, of course, before his leave was up: he had got an extension: he did not return to India till July—the end of July." Belle sighed a heart-breaking sigh, as she placed her hand timidly in his, and breathed a fervent inward prayer, that when he returned to the gorgeous East, he would take her with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAJOR RECEIVES HIS LAST TELEGRAM.

"He that dies pays all debts."

—THE TEMPEST.

THE winter waned, spring came in with showers and lambs and primroses, but brought few changes in Ballingool. Mrs. Redmond's health was now failing perceptibly. She rarely went forth in the bath chair, and leant more and more on Betty.

Mrs. Malone complained incessantly of face-ache and looked proportionately wretched, and was occasionally seen stealing out of Mrs. Maccabe's parlour, where she had been "having a read" of one of Lizzie's letters, for Denis was a miserable correspondent. The young people were doing well, and Lizzie proudly informed her aunt that "no one out there knew her from a real lady," but this was a mistake on Lizzie's part, and ignorance is bliss.

The Major was more from home than formerly, and received more telegrams and more bills than of yore, was as red in the face as a Christmas turkey cock, and was waited on by his household with an even greater amount of assiduous apologetic attention. Cuckoo and Betty scoured the country with the dogs, or sat with their heads bent over an atlas or a French dictionary, and Miss Dopping, a prisoner in the fetters of rheu-

matism, occupied her usual seat in the window, and watched passing events, and delivered powerful and pungent criticisms on men, women, and things. As for Belle, she read novels and drank tea, and wrote letters (George Holroyd was frequently favoured), refurbished her wardrobe against his return, and mentally—oh, happiest moments! made an extravagant catalogue of her trousseau and Indian outfit.

One evening, as Mrs. Redmond and her two companions were sitting at tea, the door burst open, and Maria Finny hurried in unannounced. She wore an old garden hat and shawl, and had evidently come in by the back way, and kitchen entrance.

"There's terrible work at Bridgetstown," she panted, "and I have just run over to tell you."

"What, what has happened this time?" enquired Belle, with bright, excited eyes.

"The Major is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Mrs. Redmond. "Nonsense!"

"Yes, went off in an apoplexy, or a stroke. Mrs. Malone looked into the study an hour after lunch (indeed it was about Jane Bolland's bill), and you know he was always a heavy eater. She saw him lying face downwards on the table, with a telegram in his hand. She screamed to Jane, and between them they lifted him up, and he was dead, stone dead, with the red cat sitting beside him. Mrs. Malone has been from one faint into another ever since, and I just ran over to tell you," and she gasped for breath.

After this announcement there was a profound silence for some seconds, and then Betty said:

"How dreadful! How sudden! Why I was speaking to him this morning as he drove past the gate."

"Well, you will never speak to him again," returned Maria, emphatically.

"Poor Mrs. Malone," continued Betty. "Who is with her and Cuckoo?"

"No one, so I just come to fetch you, Betty; you know the ways of the house; they are used to you, and there must be some one to keep things together. They say Mrs. Malone is in for some illness from the shock, and you know what Cuckoo is. She has been screeching and crying ever since it was found, at three o'clock."

Yes, the big, burly, loud-voiced Major that had driven past the gate flourishing his whip a few hours ago was now merely "it," and had been laid out on the study sofa, awaiting the county coroner.

"May I go, Aunt Emma?" enquired Betty. "I think I might be of some use. I can nurse a little, and I know all the keys."

"To be sure you can go," returned her cousin promptly, "get ready at once."

Betty's services at such a time would cement the intimacy between the families, and draw the houses of Noone and Bridgetstown more closely together; of course George would be coming home. Then, to Maria: "Have you telegraphed for Mr. Holroyd?"

"No, I never thought of him. I am glad you reminded me."

"Shall I telegraph?" said Belle eagerly.

"Oh no, just give me his address, and I will send a wire as I pass the Post Office. Dr. Moran is up there. He can do no harm to a man once he is dead, but we shall want some one with some sense. From what I can gather, affairs are in an awful state. I should not be surprised if the creditors seized the body; there will be nothing but debts coming in to the widow."

"Oh, I hope not, poor woman," said Mrs. Redmond sympathetically."

"This was the Derby day, you know, and the

Major has lost tremendously. He backed some horse for a great deal, and the telegram in his hand said: 'King Canute not placed.'"

"You don't think he—he made away with himself?" said Mrs. Redmond in a mysterious manner.

"Oh, no; it was just this bad news on the top of a very heavy lunch that killed him. Dr. Moran said it was—not that *he* knows much about it."

"Still, I suppose, he knows apoplexy from suicide," said Belle briskly.

Leaving Maria to enlarge on the tragedy and the dismal prospects of the Malones, Betty hurried away to put on her hat, and to pack a small hand-bag with necessary articles, and in a very short time she and Maria were walking over to Bridgetstown in the cool summer night. At Bridgetstown all was confusion; lights were flitting from window to window and crowds of "well-wishers to the family," pervaded the kitchen, passages and hall. Luckily Miss Dopping and Mrs. Maccabe had arrived upon the scene. The former locked the study, and then cleared the upper passages of sympathetic and excited neighbours, whilst Mrs. Maccabe made very short work of the lower regions; even Jane Bolland (who almost represented the local press) was swept out as mercilessly as Foxy Joe. By twelve o'clock at night, Betty was left alone, and was the temporal head of that large, silent, disorganised mansion. Cuckoo had cried herself to sleep, and Mrs. Malone was in a kind of restless slumber. She went round the house with a candle in one hand, and a bunch of keys in the other, carefully bolting doors and windows, and locking up presses and drawers. Next day the inquest was held, and Mrs. Malone was seriously ill, rambling in her mind, and calling for Denis, or thanking George in extravagant terms for his

great generosity, pleading with the creditors for time, and with the Major for money, and showing threatening symptoms of brain fever. On Betty fell all the responsibility until George's arrival. She answered notes of enquiry, saw people, wrote letters, ordered mourning, nursed Mrs. Malone, and managed the house-keeping. Belle strolled up in the afternoon and looked over the house, critically examined the old silver wine coolers, and branch candlesticks, wondered if they were Malone or Holroyd heirlooms? and then returned to Noone to practise some songs for George, specially that one of almost deadly significance :

"Si vous n'avez rien a me dire."

The following morning George arrived, pale, dusty, and haggard from incessant travelling.

"You here," he said to Betty, as she met him on the stairs. "How good of you ; I half expected to find you." He went up immediately, and saw his mother in her darkened room. She stretched out both her thin, hard-worked hands, and exclaimed, "*Denis!* No, it's George.

"George, I am thankful you have come. Betty is here too. You and she must manage everything. Oh, my poor head! Oh, George, wasn't it dreadful? I think I am going mad, I am sure I am;" and then she began to wander and talk about Denis. "Oh, my dear boy, *such* a bill from Nolan's for you. I don't know what I am to do about it. I can never, *never* squeeze it out of the house-keeping money. Last time, you know, I sold two dozens of the large silver forks and an old teapot, but I am always in terror lest they should be missed."

Betty hurried George away, before his mother began to talk about *him*. He and Belle seemed a good deal on her mind, and she would urge him

imploringly to "have nothing to say to Belle Redmond. She is just a garrison hack, and very selfish, giddy, and ill-tempered. I wish you would fall in love with Betty"; it would never do for this constant appeal to come to George's ears. Next to Denis' debts it was ever on her tongue. "George, you have been *so* good to me, I wish you had a nice wife! I wish you would marry Betty Redmond. She may not be as handsome as Belle; but she is young and pretty, and good; oh, *do* marry Betty Redmond."

Betty, who had almost driven him out of his mother's room, said with her finger on her lips:

"She must be kept perfectly quiet and know nothing. Her mind has had a great shock, but if left quite undisturbed she will rally; so Dr. Moran says. Now if you will come downstairs, I will get you some breakfast. I daresay you are very hungry."

Whilst he sat over his meal, Betty gave him a hasty outline of what had occurred; of what she had done; of what there was to do; and handed him a truly formidable packet of letters—chiefly bills.

"And now that you have arrived," she concluded, "I think I shall go home. I can come up here every day, and stay from morning till evening."

"No, no, please do not," he interrupted hastily. "I could never get along alone. You would not expect me to do the house-keeping. Who is to nurse my mother, and befriend Cuckoo, and look after the servants? If you will only stay for a short time, you will be doing us the greatest kindness. My mother is so fond of you. You said you were her eldest daughter, and I am sure you would not desert her now."

And Betty remained. Pale-faced, hysterical Cuckoo was her shadow, helpless but affectionate, following her in and out of the rooms and in and

out of the house, like a dog. Betty wrote, and sewed, and nursed, and personally interviewed anxious callers, undertook all arrangements about the luncheon after the funeral, hemmed black hat bands, and made Cuckoo's frock. At first it seemed strange to George, that he and Betty should be virtually the head of this large, disorderly house, sitting opposite to each other at meals, just as if they were the real master and mistress, and laying their heads together in many anxious consultations over grave matters. Betty was an invaluable nurse, so light-footed, cheerful and firm; she spent a good deal of her time in the invalid's room and George passed many weary hours in the study, endeavouring to evolve some order out of chaos. Each morning the post-bag was heavy with bills, large, clamouring, and alarming. There were bills to take up and renew, there were mortgages, there was every description of angry dun. Major Malone's creditors had long passed from the obsequious to the formally polite, the polite to the freezingly-laconic, from the freezingly-laconic to the threatening stage.

George's cheek burnt, as he glanced at some of these effusions, and his head ached, and his heart sank, as he went over them. Dozen after dozen. What were company's accounts or mess accounts in comparison to these? At length he called in the aid of the family solicitor, and between them they endeavoured to reach the bottom of affairs. After groping for several days, among a perfect sea of debts, they came to the conclusion that Major Malone—who had never known any personal inconvenience from want of money, who had brow-beaten all his creditors, and who had the most imposing funeral that had been seen for years in those parts—had died as much a pauper as if he had breathed his last in the county workhouse,

The place was gone from the Malones for ever. Also the farms, the stock, the silver, and the furniture. All that Mrs. Malone could claim or carry from her home, was her own exceedingly shabby wardrobe. She and Cuckoo were literally penniless; her jointure had been disposed of, and gambled away; she had not a pound in the world; her very bed was the property of a money-lender; there was not a scrap of salvage out of the wreck. Loud-voiced angry men and women, some with hooked noses, pervaded the avenue and grounds, and the house was almost in a state of siege!

"What was to be done?" George asked himself, as with a burning head he walked up and down the long garden walk in the cool June evening, after hours spent in writing letters, and holding interviews. He must get his mother and Cuckoo away to some quiet suburb near Dublin, where Cuckoo could be sent to school, and where they could live cheaply. To ensure their existing at all, he must at once hand over almost the whole of his own private income; four hundred a year would be little enough for them to live upon, for his mother was a bad manager, and had caught her husband's craze for running up bills. Yes, he saw nothing for it but to relinquish his own small fortune. This he could contemplate with equanimity; he could live without it.

But another duty was ten times more difficult. He must give up Betty. How could he relinquish Betty? How was he to live without *her*?

* * * * *

Betty had long ago made her peace, though she had never breathed a word of her mistake that evening in the meadow lane. Absence had not obliterated her image from his mind—quite the reverse. He saw her now in the fierce light that beats upon people with whom you live in hourly

contact. He saw her devotion to his mother. Her unselfishness and energy, and cheerfulness, were all made known to him. She was not merely a very pretty acquaintance, with lovely grey eyes and a merry laugh, who sat a horse to perfection. She was something more in his eyes: she was the girl he loved.

He never cast a thought to Belle. Betty had swept her out of his mind, and, so to speak, closed the door. She came to Noone, almost daily, and looked into his face with a tender sisterly sympathetic gaze, and asked for his dear mother, and sighed, and "hoped that Betty was of some use! She was a good, willing child, and fond of nursing, though, perhaps, a little brusque and rough. Now I myself," said Belle, "am so exquisitely sensitive, that I cannot bear to see grief or pain; it makes me *ill*, but I have felt for you acutely. I have thought so much of you, dear Mr. Holroyd, in all your trouble," and tears actually trembled on her lashes—theatrical tears.

"Words are cheap," thought George as he walked with her to the avenue gate, when she bade him a lingering good-bye. Give him deeds—one night of watching, against fifty pretty speeches. His eyes were opened widely now, and he appraised pretty, worldly, selfish, Belle at her true value.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

"Meet me by moonlight alone,
And then I will tell you a tale."

—J. A. WADE,

It was the very last evening at Bridgetstown, a lovely one, towards the end of June; never had the place (now passing for ever from the Malones)

looked to greater advantage. The pleasure ground was quite a blaze of roses, and all the garden walks were bordered by fragrant mignonette, wallflower, and sweet pea. Mrs. Malone, who was now convalescent, and able to be downstairs, was holding a melancholy and final interview with Miss Dopping and the Finneys—she and Mrs. Finny mingling their tears, whilst Maria and Miss Dopping kept up a cross fire of would-be consolatory remarks. The Malones were leaving for Dublin the next morning, and Betty, who had been packing hard for three days, came out with Cuckoo for a breath of air, and a farewell round of the pleasure grounds and garden. But Cuckoo was presently summoned indoors, and Betty was left alone—she was tired, very tired, and seating herself on the steps inside the garden gate, with her chin resting on her hand, looked up at the full silver moon, with a face almost as white as her dress.

George, who had been solacing himself with a cigar, descried her from a distance, and hastened to join her; he scarcely ever got a chance of having a word with her alone now, and here was a long sought opportunity. The evening breezes blew across their faces, and brought with them the scents of thousands of roses, the very spirit of summer seemed riding on the night, and summoning all people out of doors—to come and do her homage, but the only two at Bridgetstown who stood among the moonlit flowers were George Holroyd and Betty Redmond.

"Well, this is the last night at Bridgetstown!" he said, "and the old place is looking its best, as if it was determined to haunt our memories. There is the yellow rose I helped you to nail up—do you remember? I think I deserve one—as a memento."

"Then I am sure you may help yourself," she returned composedly.

"No, I want *you* to give me one."

"Very well," rising and breaking off a heavy-headed yellow rose.

"I shall never see **this old tree** again," he said, as he took it from her. "Nor the house and grounds of Bridgetstown—nor—nor——"

"Nor any one in Ballingooole," she added, without raising her eyes.

"Do not say that," he returned gravely; "I hope to see every one, and above all to see you, Betty. What should we have done without you."

"It was nothing," she replied, reseating herself wearily. "I have always been at home here, long," looking at him with a somewhat watery smile, "before you came! When are you going back to India? Soon?"

"As soon as I have settled my mother comfortably in Dublin."

"Then to-morrow will be good-bye?"

"No, I shall run down again for a day. Betty, I want to ask you something;" he latterly called her by her Christian name quite naturally. "You remember when we came back from Roskeen, where we had always been such good friends—had we not?"

Betty nodded, and stared at an enormous bush of lavender, with a somewhat fixed expression.

"Afterwards, when I met you at home, you would scarcely speak to me, or even look at me—will you tell me the reason of this? for I know you are a girl who always *has* a reason for her actions?"

"Yes—if you wish it very much—I will," she answered, drawing a pattern in the gravel with the toe of her shoe, "but I would much rather not tell you."

"And I would so much rather that you did tell me."

"It—it was only the evening after I came home—I made a mistake—I was in the meadow lane, and I saw Lizzie Maccabe and a gentleman; he seemed very fond of her—and she said that it was *you*."

"I am sure I am excessively obliged to her! And so that was the reason! Oh, Betty, how could you believe her—surely you know by this time *who* it is that I care about."

Betty's heart beat fearfully fast, but she managed to control her voice, and to say quite naturally:

"I thought you were to carry that yellow rose to India—you are picking it to pieces, and will have nothing left but the stalk."

George also exercised all his self-command; hot, passionate words, that came flocking to his lips, were fiercely forced back, by common sense, honour and reason. He had no right to ask this girl, who had seen nothing of the world, to share his present poverty. He must first work for her, and then win her. Nevertheless he could not go without *one* word, without some frail hope, were it but a look or a flower, and his heart sank within him when he thought of Ghosty Moore. Oh, if he and Betty were but the real master and mistress of that fine old house behind them, how happy he would be! But what was the good of wishing—he was going to India. In ten days' time, the seas would be rolling between him and Betty.

"I want you to tell me something else," he said. "I should like to hear your opinion about a friend of mine. A man I know very well." His voice shook a little as he mentioned this. "He is desperately in love with a girl, but he has lost every penny of his money, and does not think it honourable to ask her to bind herself to him in any way, until his lot is more assured. Do you think if *she* knew this, and supposing that *she* cared about him

—she would trust in his silence, and wait, say, a year?"

No answer for quite a long interval—for Betty could not find her voice. Suddenly she stood up and glanced at his pale, tense face.

"Well—what do you think?" he asked in a low, eager tone.

"I am sure she would."

"Would *you*, if you were she?" he enquired, and his voice shook.

"Yes," she responded, almost in a whisper.

Betty looked at him, the veil was drawn between their two souls, and they knew each other's hearts.

To George, her eyes seemed to speak all that was sweetest and best in the world; he took the little hand that still held a rose, and removing the flower, kissed it reverently and fervently. What a cold, trembling little hand it was! How quickly it was withdrawn. For at this supreme moment, the inevitable Cuckoo came running to the gate and peering eagerly through, called: "Betty, where are you? Bet, come in, mother wants you immediately!" And Betty hastily snatched her fingers away, and turned to face Mrs. Malone's untimely emissary—her future sister-in-law. George loved her past all doubting, truly; with this conviction in her heart, she moved to the gate which he held open. George loved her, that was enough. What was money—what was time, what was anything? She would wait for him for years—for ever. As she walked slowly back through the fragrant pleasure grounds she seemed to be treading on air, although Cuckoo dragged from her arm, with an exceedingly earthly weight.

Strange to say, that usually unguarded young lady, made no remark beyond some incoherent suggestions about Boozle and his basket, but for the remainder of the evening she was amazingly

silent—unnaturally solemn, and followed George with deeply inquisitive and interested eyes—Betty had returned to her packing.

The scene inside the gate, embowered in roses, handsome George kissing Betty's hand, and Betty standing so tall and white, like some young queen, was photographed on her memory for ever; she was a notoriously sharp young person, and the picture only ratified what she had long suspected, that George and Betty were in love with each other.

In a few days, Mrs. Malone and Cuckoo, Crab and Boozle, were installed in a small, detached house, close to a church, post office and train. George had done his best for his mother. For her, he had given up his furlough schemes—his private income, save fifty pounds, and his present hopes. She wept in gasps upon his shoulder, and sobbed out "that he was the best of sons, no one was like him, no one," urgently suggested that he should apply to his Uncle Godfrey for an allowance—and in her heart loved Denis! To feel herself the free, unfettered owner of a small, but comfortable villa; at liberty to come and go, and spend and cry just as much as she pleased was (but this is for your private ear) a truly blessed relief! She wore the outward garb of woe, and used mourning paper, with inch deep black border, and envelopes so woeful that scarcely room was left for an address, and publicly bemoaned the late dear Major, and actually imagined that she was his truly disconsolate widow.

George's departure was sudden; a telegram gave him forty-eight hours to embark, and he instantly took the train for Ballingcole, ostensibly to make some final family arrangements, but in reality to say good-bye to Betty.

His visit was quite unexpected. Betty was in the garden, picking strawberries for preserving.

Mrs. Redmond was lying down, and Belle was standing disconsolately in the drawing-room window, staring at the lawn, the fir trees, and the grey clouds that hung over a distant low range of hills, betokening either rain or heat.

"Mr. Holroyd," said the parlour-maid abruptly, and she sprang round, her whole face transformed from gloom to sunlight in one second.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," she cried, holding out both hands, "we did not know when we were to expect you."

"I came down to-day only for an hour. I got my orders this morning, and I'm off to-morrow—sail in the *Malabar* on Saturday."

Belle's nostrils quivered, but for once she restrained herself; she merely said: "How is your mother?"

"Wonderfully well and cheerful; she has found some old friends already, and is beginning to feel at home."

"And Cuckoo?" with very forced composure.

"Cuckoo goes to school, and, strange to say, likes it. I hope Mrs. Redmond is well."

"No, she is but poorly to-day. I am afraid she will not be able to come down and wish you good-bye. How we shall miss you," then "How I shall miss you, for you cannot think—you can never know—what your society has been to me in this hateful, melancholy place! Now it will be ten times more dreary than ever," and there were tears in her voice.

Silence—an uncomfortable but golden silence. George looked steadily at one particular patch in the carpet; Belle always talked in this exaggerated way; he wished she would not be quite so confoundedly personal.

"Where is Betty?" he enquired in a would-be cheerful tone.

"Oh, out with the dogs—somewhere about the place. Do you want to see her?"

("Did he want to see her? Did he want to see his queen, his star, his goddess?") Should he give Belle a hint?—No.

"Yes, I should like to wish her good-bye."

"She is probably in the garden making herself ill with fruit!" said her cousin ill-naturedly.

"Oh, you must not go just yet" (seeing that he was about to rise) biting her lips to retain her composure, "you will not forget us—and you will write often, will you not?" she added desperately; her eyes fixed anxiously on his.

"Yes, I shall certainly write; it is very good of you to wish for my letters."

"They will be my only happiness," was her most embarrassing reply; "you won't forget me, will you, George," she whispered. George rose hastily, this conference was too personal to be pleasant; this pretty little woman, with the tragic dark eyes was becoming a nuisance.

"I hate saying good-bye," holding out his hand as he spoke. "But I must be making a start, my train goes at five o'clock, and I have not much time to lose."

"Oh, you have an hour still; it won't take you more than half that time to get to the station," she pleaded in a strangled voice.

(Yes, quite true, but he had yet to see Betty, and every moment was priceless.)

"I must really go," he said firmly, "I have business at Bridgetstown."

Belle stood up, as white as a ghost, and gazed at him despairingly.

It was not alone George Holroyd who was going, it was her life, her hopes, her future; she felt more than half inclined to throw herself into his arms, but something in his face arrested her

intention, and she merely gave him her hand, and turning away her face, sank in a heap upon the sofa, in a storm of hysterical tears—and George escaped. To look back would have been to emulate Let's wife ; to linger was destruction.

As he left the house, he gazed anxiously about him, and then he descried a welcome trio—three little white dogs trotting along from the direction of the garden, and presently a tall, girlish figure carrying on her arm a good-sized basket of strawberries. A lovely colour came into her face as she recognised him. He seized her hand eagerly, and said :

"I was afraid I might miss you ! I got sudden orders, and I start to-morrow, so I just ran down to say good-bye to *you*."

He still retained her hand in his, whilst the dogs sat round, staring at him affectionately, as if giving the young couple their countenance and consent ; the little group was commanded by the drawing-room windows, but, luckily for them, Belle's jealous eyes were buried in the sofa cushions.

"Will you walk down to the gate ?" he asked, releasing her hand, and taking the basket. "I left the car there—I have still to go up the town, and my time is very, very short."

They walked down that miserably short avenue, almost in total silence ; how many things they would think of to say, *afterwards*. How passionately they would regret this sinful waste of five minutes—precious, golden minutes—but the truth was, they were determined to be very brave, and their hearts were too full to speak. When they came near the gate they halted, for at the gate itself stood Juggy with the key in her hand. She locked and unlocked the entrance to Noone as rigorously as if it were a jail, but if people could

go in and out without *her* help, her occupation and her sixpences would be gone, and Mrs. Redmond winked at the arrangement—as she gave Juggy no wages.

“Give me one token, Betty, before I go,” he urged in an eager whisper. “Once you promised me whatever I asked for ; give me that little silver brooch you are wearing.”

Betty unpinned it hastily, and put it in his hand ; a shabby little “Mizpah” brooch ! a present from Belle.

‘Good-bye, God bless you, Betty !’ he said in a husky, unsteady voice.

She raised her eyes to his, they were dim with tears, but love is easily satisfied, and the farewell look they interchanged, contented them for many a day. They knew that they could trust each other. In another moment he was gone, and the shabby iron gate had clanged behind him. She would catch one last glimpse as he repassed to the train, and — *No—no*, she must not cry yet. Leaving her basket under a bush, she raced along by the demesne wall, for fully a quarter of a mile, to where it ended, and gave place to a white paling lined with shrubs, and overshadowed by trees : and here she took her station and waited patiently, listening with a beating heart for the rattle of the hack car on the hard, dusty highway. It came at last, nearer and nearer ; she would not discover herself, no, she only wanted one last look. He was on the far side, but oh, comfort ! Oh, happy moment ; he turned and gazed back at Noone, until the car flew round the corner, and carried him finally out of her sight. Yes, he was really gone. Then Betty crept out from the bushes, and sat down upon a log, and to the amazement of her three companions, sobbed aloud. She dared not cry like this indoors, where walls had ears ; here

the old beeches were her kind sympathetic friends. If she were seen at Noone, indulging in such grief, she would be asked to explain the reason of her tears. But that was her secret, and George's.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THINE ONLY."

"Infinite riches in a little room.

—MARLOWE.

GEORGE HOLROYD'S departure left an aching void, a desolate blank at Noone. Belle missed him acutely; here was another disappointment, the last and worst! Betty shed secret tears, and even Juggy, at the gate, openly and loudly bemoaned, "that fine open-handed young gentleman."

Belle was not in love with George, but she liked him, and his departure, without one word of significance, threw her into a paroxysm of angry despair. She severely cross-examined Betty as to whether he had said anything about *her*, when she had met him in the avenue, also as to whether he looked at all sorry or cut up?

Betty admitted that he had (this with a rather guilty conscience—How could she tell her fierce questioner that his regrets were for herself?) and that deeply dissatisfied lady relapsed into low spirits, a fractious temper, and her old clothes. She wrote to George steadily, and he in return sent her amusing descriptions of his voyage out, of his station, of his munshi, and of his dogs, invariably concluding with some message to Betty—which Belle did not consider it worth while to repeat. Her only hope now—and that a faint one—was that George would write to her to join him; and in her letters, she mentioned more than once how sincerely she *envied* him living in warm sunny

India, instead of rainy, melancholy, dull Ballingoo; and imparted her views, and sentiments with a charming disregard of conventional restraint. He had always been a most appreciative and attentive acquaintance, but alas! he had never let fall anything approaching to an offer of marriage. He had given her songs, books, photographs, but there had never been a hint of offering himself. "Not as yet," whispered hope.

She read large extracts of his letters aloud to eager and interested Betty, and interested and puzzled Maria Finny, and indeed there was no reason why she might not have read them straight on from—Dear Miss Redmond to Yours Sincerely, for there was not a line that even Jane Bolland at the post-office could weave into a romance; and she talked of "her letters from Mr. Holroyd" so constantly, and carried them about her person so ostentatiously, that Maria began to fear she was engaged; and even Betty, could barely stifle the mutterings of the green-eyed monster. The summer was a dull one, especially to Belle; far be it from *her* to fish or boat on the canal, or to go in quest of mushrooms or blackberries in high-heeled French boots. There were hopeless wet days, which drowned the hay and flowers, and subsequently made the country intensely and patriotically green. There were a few picnics, a few gatherings, where crowds of pretty girls were expected to amuse one another, and men were in a deplorable minority, and even then, stout elderly fathers of families, and married curates. Belle and Betty partook of some of these festivities; the latter was a girl who enjoyed herself anywhere, who was happy in the society of young people of her own age, who played tennis, climbed hills, made salad, and boiled kettles, with a merry beaming face, and did not care if there was not one repre-

sentative of the sterner sex among the company, since the only man *she* wished to see, was thousands of miles away at the other side of the world. But not so Belle. Oh, dear no. Her temper and her face were the unerring barometer by which you might judge of the number of the men at a party. If there was a respectable muster, and one of these had singled her out for special attention, had walked with her, talked with her, and made love to her, she was all smiles and sprightliness on her way home. If, on the other hand, she had had no cavalier, she made herself conspicuously disagreeable; sat aloof and sulked, refused to sing, refused to play tennis, presently announced an agonising headache, and withdrew at an early hour, carrying poor Betty in her train.

"The idea!" she would grumble, as they jolted homeward in a local cover-car. "I call it an insult for people to ask us to drive nine miles, and to wear our best dresses, in order to walk round a weedy old garden, with a pack of giggling girls, and to play tennis in grass that is nearly up to one's knees! I shall never go again, *never!*"

This was her frequent threat, but the next invitation was invariably accepted, and the excitement of looking over her dresses, speculating on her chances of amusement, and fighting with her mother for the money for new gloves and the fare of a car, occupied her until the event (possibly another insult) came off!

Betty had always enjoyed herself, and said so frankly, and stood up for the company, the hosts, and the garden.

"Of course *you* think it very fine," Belle would rejoin scornfully, "because you know no better—walking arm in arm through cabbages with Katie Moore is the height of bliss to *you*—you don't know what pleasure is!"

Betty had nevertheless a very good idea of what it meant, when her birthday brought her long letters from Mrs. Malone, and Cuckoo, and the former despatched a box containing what she said was "a little souvenir from George, which he hoped she would do him the honour to accept," Betty's heart beat double time, as she carefully removed the wrappings; he had been gone now for five months, and this was the first token he had sent her. The wrapping gave place to a morocco leather case, and in that case was a massive gold Indian bangle on which was inscribed one word in strange characters that looked like hieroglyphics, or was it merely a bit of ornament? She could not tell—the letters—if they were letters—stood out in high relief. At any rate it was a lovely bangle and she had but little jewellery, but that was not the reason why she kissed it so tenderly. How good it was of him! and this was not her only present; there was a gold thimble from Katie Moore, a pin-cushion from Cuckoo, and a ten-pound note from Miss Dopping, which was enclosed in a letter delivered by Foxy Joe—a letter bidding her buy something *for herself*, and please her old friend, Sally Dopping, who could not find any suitable gift in the shops of Ballin-goole. Betty ran down to breakfast, with a radiant face, and eagerly displayed her presents to Mrs. Redmond and Belle (who had no gifts to offer her). Belle became rather red and there was a somewhat awkward silence, as she turned over, and critically scrutinised, the gold bangle. But when her mother said, "A very *proper* attention, Betty, I only wonder that he did not think of it before. Gratitude is a rare virtue! I was often surprised, that he made no acknowledgment of all your attention to his mother after the Major's death. Better late than never!"

In this manner Betty's birthday present, was explained to Belle's complete satisfaction, and she looked upon George's gift to her cousin, as a sort of indirect compliment to herself.

"Was there a letter?" she asked suspiciously.

"No, not any," returned Betty with a vivid blush.

"Oh, then there will be no necessity to write and thank him. I will send a nice message from you when I write next mail."

Betty made no reply. She thought it would be better to express her gratitude through George's mother! She wore the bangle constantly, for it was a plain, and what Mrs. Redmond termed, "every-day affair." Nevertheless, one afternoon, it attracted Dr. Moran's notice, as she sat before Miss Dopping's fire, stroking the old hound, and he smoked a Trichy cheroot. Miss Dopping's visitors might smoke (gossips said that she smoked herself! but this was not true, but I will not deny that now and then—*only* now and then—she took a pinch of snuff). Dr. Moran had been in the army, and had seen service in India, had tended the wounded after Chillianwallah, and been several times under fire, though no one would suspect it. He was a very silent, spare, reserved old bachelor, who had a small private fortune, and lived in Ballingoole, because he had been born there. He was eccentric like his neighbour Miss Dopping; wore an apron at home to protect his trousers from the fire, made his own tea, mended his own shirts, spent a large portion of his income on literature and tobacco—and was ever haunted by the fear, that *Maria Finny would marry him*.

"What is that thing you have on your wrist?" he enquired. "Let me see it. It looks like an Indian bangle," stretching out a bony brown hand.

"And so it is," replied Betty, removing it and offering it to him, as she spoke.

Dr. Moran slowly put on his glasses, and examined the ornament as critically as Belle had done.

"Do you know what this writing means, young lady?" he asked presently, looking keenly over his spectacles.

"No, I was not even sure that it *was* writing."

"It is one word in Urdu letters."

"Can you make it out?"

"Yes—easily enough, and if the bangle was given to you by a young man, it means a great deal. This word 'Tumhara,' interpreted into English is simply '*Thine* alone.'"

Miss Dopping—who knew the donor of the bangle—coughed sharply, and glanced at Betty, with an extraordinary amount of expression in her little beady eyes.

She even so far forgot herself as to wink, and Betty coloured to the roots of her hair. She had been a wee bit envious of all those foreign envelopes with green stamps; not that she did not trust George with all her heart, and he had said that he would not write. Still, there had been a curious, uneasy, unsatisfactory sensation, that, if not exactly jealousy, was jealousy's first cousin, and now, after all, her precious gold bangle and its message was worth a thousand of Belle's letters.

"So that's the way of it," exclaimed Miss Dopping after Betty had left, "and I am glad of it," for she knew George well, and he was one of her prime favourites, with his handsome face and pleasant manners. Many a time she had rapped for him, from her window, and many a visit he had paid her, and now she came to think of it, he always drew the conversation round to Betty. "I knew she wouldn't look at Ghosty Moore," she added triumphantly.

"And why not?" said Dr. Moran incre-

dulously. "Holroyd is only a subaltern in a marching regiment, with a mother and sister to support, whilst Ghosty Moore is an eldest son, and heir to a splendid property—I only hope she may never do worse."

"Worse—than that poor miserable anatomy of a creature! Did you ever see him in shooting-boots and long stockings?"

"Never."

"Well then I have—and his legs look for all the world like a pair of knitting needles, stuck in two sods of turf! Now George Holroyd has a leg that you might model."

"And you'd have a girl marry a man for his leg?" he asked with a sneer.

"No, you old owl! No, but for his handsome face and honourable conduct and kind heart. If Betty Redmond marries *him*, she will be a lucky girl, and I'll give her something more than my blessing! And so you may just keep your gibes to yourself, Paddy Moran."

CHAPTER XVII.

BELLE *versus* BETTY.

"The last and greatest art, the art to blot."

—POPE.

SUMMER had come round once more at Ballingoo, and the little place and surrounding society was much as it had been twelve months previously, save for the change at Bridgetstown—(now let to a dairyman, who churned in the drawing-room, kept ducks in the kitchen, and calves in the pleasure ground). Belle had spent two brilliant, but barren, months at Southsea, with an elderly widow, and returned in the early autumn to Noone (and to the winter of her discontent). Betty had

also been from home, and paid a visit to Roskeen, whence she had arrived somewhat unexpectedly—for a reason only known to Ghosty Moore and herself.

Mrs. Redmond's health had long been failing; she had entirely relinquished her airings in the bath-chair; she took but a subordinate interest in rabbits and fruit, and had signed a truce with Mrs. Maccabe (who sent an oblation of sweetbreads by Foxy Joe). Latterly the old lady never rose till mid-day, and Betty brought her breakfast and letters to her bedside, read aloud the daily paper, and made suggestions about dinner; whilst Robinson sat in close attendance on the invalid, and devoured choice morsels of buttered toast—for Mrs. Redmond's appetite was now a thing of the past. Belle was never astir before eleven o'clock, and, with regard to the immortal bird, was inclined to agree with the man who said, "The more fool the worm for getting up so early." One morning she sauntered into her mother's room, with an unusually dissatisfied face; it was a wet day. She had had no letters, and she was suffering from a twinge of toothache.

"How are you, mother, this morning?" she enquired languidly.

"A little better, darling; and how are you?"

"Oh, I'm as usual! wishing I was dead," walking over and staring out of the window, down which the rain was streaming in a most depressing manner—out on the big trees, that looked dim through the mist, out on the gravel drive, with its little pools of water.

"Belle, my dearest, you must not say that."

"Why not, when it is true?" enquired Belle with a fierceness engendered of temper and toothache. "Mother," she continued, now walking to the foot of the bed, and clutching the rail in her

hands, and speaking through her set teeth, "can't you see that this life is killing me by inches? It's all very well for Betty, who has never known any other; she likes the country, and dogs, and horses, and long walks—she even likes the common people and the rain! She has never had an admirer. She is not like me—you know what I have been accustomed to, what my life was, and what *this* is. If I only had [the courage, I would drown myself in the canal—I swear I would."

"Belle!" expostulated her mother.

"Could you not give up Noone, and let it, in spite of that brute, old Brian, and go away and take lodgings for the winter at Brighton or South-sea; at least, we should see something out of our windows, instead of this eternal grass and fir-trees? We could live on very little; we might get a hamper from here every week. Betty could stay with old Sally."

Mrs. Redmond shook her head sadly; she knew that she was very ill, that it was more than doubtful if she would ever pass the gates of Noone again—save in her coffin.

"If we don't get away from this hateful hole," continued Belle, looking fixedly at her mother, with a white face and gleaming eyes, "I shall do something desperate—I know I shall, and I warn you that I shall."

So saying she snatched the *Irish Times* off the bed, and swept out of the room.

Mrs. Redmond sank back feebly among her pillows, and a good many unusual tears trickled down her poor, faded cheeks. What more could she do for Belle? Had she not always done her best for her imprudent, impetuous child?

All through that weary, wet day, she was unusually silent and depressed, and heaved many a long sigh at short intervals. The very next

morning, in sorting out the contents of the post bag, she discovered a letter from India, addressed to herself, in Mr. Holroyd's writing. It was not for Belle! No, there was "Mrs. Redmond" as plain as pen could write it; her dull eyes brightened, and her face flushed as she tore it open. Here was a proposal for Belle *at last*! But—but—what was this?

An enclosure directed to Miss Elizabeth Redmond. The old lady's hands shook as she scanned it, and her jaw dropped, and the "rigor mortis" seemed already visible in the outlines of her once jovial countenance. She thrust it hastily under the counterpane, as if it stung her, and slowly unfolded her own letter, which ran as follows:—

"DEAR MRS. REDMOND,—I hope you will not be surprised to receive a letter from *me*, nor to read the address of the enclosed note, nor to hear that I have been attached to your niece for some time—(yes, niece). My prospects when I was at home were so very poor that I did not feel justified in speaking to you on a subject nearest my heart, nor in asking her to bind herself to a long engagement. I have been working very hard this last year, and have passed the Higher Standard in Hindustani, in hopes of getting some staff appointment and increase of pay, and now within a week, my fortunes have taken a turn for the better. My uncle, who has discovered my impoverished state, has made me an allowance of five hundred a year, and begged that I will marry. I will gladly carry out his wishes, if you will give me Betty. No doubt she could marry a wealthier man (here he was thinking of Ghosty Moore), and make what is called a far better match, but it would be impossible for any one to love her as much as I do. I hope you will not be startled to

hear that I am asking for Betty at once. Colonel and Mrs. Calvert, very old friends of mine, are leaving London for Bombay the end of September; she could come out with them, and they would be present at our wedding soon after they had landed. I enclose Colonel Calvert's address, and if you will write to him he will make all arrangements about a passage, and is empowered to draw on my bankers. I am afraid I am giving you very short notice—barely a month, but the Calverts' escort is a grand opportunity, and in India we do everything rapidly and suddenly. We are here to-day, and a thousand miles away next week. I am sure you will miss Betty, but if she agrees to come out to me, I know that you will gladly spare her, for I have often heard you say, that you thought India must be a paradise for young people. I do not go so far as all that, but I will do all in my power to make it a happy home for Betty. Excuse this hurried letter, I have barely time to catch the post. Kindest regards to Miss Redmond and yourself.

"Yours sincerely,

"GEORGE HOLROYD."

When Mrs. Redmond had come to the end of this epistle, she felt dizzy for a moment; a rush of blood seemed to roar in her ears, the writing appeared to dance before her eyes, she laid it down, and sank back on her pillows, trembling as if she had been dealt a blow. Suddenly she heard Betty's light step, and Betty's pleasant voice on the landing outside her door, and had barely time to thrust the letter out of sight when Betty entered—she was instantly struck by the old lady's drawn and ghastly face, and said as she leant over her:

"I am afraid you are not so well this morning. Have you had a bad night, dear?"

"Yes—a terrible night—such, such awful dreams.

I think I will try and take a little doze now. No, I don't want my drops, or anything, only to be quiet," shrinking from Betty's clear, sympathetic eyes, "if you will just draw down the blinds, and don't let anyone disturb me till I ring—Where is Belle?"

"She is not up yet; she has toothache, and is feeling rather low. I think it is something in the weather."

"Very likely my dear—do not let anyone come into the room for the next hour or two, I may get a little sleep; I will rise by and by and ring if I want Eliza; and oh, about the dinner! There is some cold mutton that will make a nice hash, and that, with the fresh herrings, will be ample—you need not mind a pudding," the ruling passion thrusting itself forward even under the present circumstances.

Having despatched her visitor with a feeling of intense relief, the old lady felt that she had now ensured privacy and leisure in which to contemplate the position, and to balance the future of the two girls—which practically lay in her hands.

First of all, she slowly read and re-read George's letter; next she examined the envelope of his enclosure.

Oh, Indian gum, for how much you have to answer!

The envelope was scarcely stuck, and came providentially (as she thought) open in her hand! After a moment's hesitation, she drew out the letter, and devoured it greedily. It began thus abruptly:

"I hope and believe that you have understood the reason of my long silence, my dearest; more than a year has elapsed since that miserable July afternoon, when you and I said good-bye to one

another, and only good-bye, but it had to be so. You knew better than anyone how poor were my prospects, and that, with my mother to support, I had hardly the means of keeping myself, much less a wife, and to ask a girl to engage herself to a pauper, or to bring her to a life of grinding poverty in this climate, far away from all her friends, is in my opinion a very questionable phase of love. I have been working hard for you, and you alone. I have passed in the language, and am now qualified for various lucrative billets—which are so far birds in the bush. Last mail, to my great surprise, I had a letter from my uncle; he has made me a most generous allowance of five hundred a year—and with this addition to my pay, I (but I hope it will be *we*) could get along very comfortably; and the gist of this is—will you come out and share it? I know you cared for me last year, but that is fifteen months ago. Can you have changed in that time? A long time—half a life-time to me. If you have, I don't know how I am to bear it. But I trust that your answer will be *yes*. Colonel and Mrs. Calvert, who are leaving London in the *Nankin* on the 30th September, will take charge of my future wife; they will look after you, as if you were their own sister, and we will be married in Bombay and spend our honeymoon in Cashmere. You will have a full month to prepare for your journey, which may seem a very scanty margin, but I know a girl out here, who was married and went home at a *week's* notice. Send me a wire if your answer is what it would have been last year, and I shall begin house-keeping on the spot. There is a pretty bungalow here, surrounded by a garden, which I have often ridden past and looked at, and thought how well it would do for us. In my day dreams I have seen you walking among the flowers, with a white umbrella

over your head, or making tea in the verandah—which is half shut in by *yellow* roses. I shall have a piano and a trap awaiting you, and I know of a pony that is the very thing to carry you. This is a quiet station—we have only about fifteen ladies, and there are but few dances, etc., but you will not mind that; you can get lots of riding and tennis, bring out a side-saddle, and, if you can, a dog. I am writing in desperate haste to catch the mail, and am not saying the quarter of what I want to say. How anxiously I shall await your answer need not be told. I calculate that I ought to get a wire on Tuesday, the twenty-seventh. Good-bye my darling Betty.

“Ever Yours,

“GEORGE HOLROYD.”

Betty's name was only once mentioned in the letter, otherwise it would do equally well for Belle. In his haste he had not crossed his “t's” and with a little careful manipulation the name could be altered.

To which of the girls should she give it?

Mrs. Redmond closed her eyes, and endeavoured to review the whole case thoroughly and impartially. She herself was not long for this world, it was possibly a question of a few months; and then what would become of Belle, with her restless ways, excitable, uncertain temper, and miserably inadequate income? She was so pretty—so dependent—so—so—spoiled. If Betty were to go to India to marry George Holroyd she would fret to death—she would break her heart; pending which, she would give way to some of her terrible fits of passion, the very thought of which made the old lady close her eyes. Belle was sufficiently discontented *now*, and what would be her state of mind when she saw Betty—who had always been

secondary to her in every way—depart with many presents, and a handsome trousseau, to India, to marry George Holroyd—a man upon whom *she* had set her heart!

Belle's temper was getting worse year by year; each disappointment had left its mark; how and where would it end? There was a touch of insanity in the family! Mrs. Redmond recalled with a shudder how she had once been taken to see her own aunt—a melancholy spectacle—creeping along by a wall, with her long, tangled black hair, hanging like a veil over her face.

Belle would possibly carry out her threat of yesterday and do something desperate, whereas, as Mr. Holroyd's wife, in some gay Indian station, well off, well dressed, and sufficiently amused and shifting her home perpetually, she would have everything her soul longed for—she would be happy—and Belle's happiness was now the sole aim of her own nearly worn-out existence.

To know that Belle was in a congenial sphere, and provided with ample means, and a strong, natural protector, would lift an immense load off her mind; but Belle, the restless inmate of some cheap boarding house, discontented, embittered, and in debt, with no one to shield, or soothe her frenzies, what would be *her* end?

With Betty it was entirely different. She was clever, bright and young. She had all her best years before her, she would be Miss Dopping's heiress—she would have plenty of lovers and friends wherever she went—she could marry Ghosty Moore to-morrow if she chose, and even if the worst came to the worst, she was strong, self-reliant and sensible—well able to stand alone and bear the knocks of fate. Not that these knocks could hurt her, for she was a lucky girl, and a general favourite. But this was Belle's last chance

(Belle, low be it whispered, was thirty-one). After an hour's cogitation, and weighing and planning, Mrs. Redmond made up her mind to give the letter to her own daughter.

"And what about George and Betty?"

"Well, Betty would never know that her cousin had taken her place; she might be a little disappointed, all girls had their love trials. Why, look at Belle, she had had dozens of far worse affairs—and Betty would get plenty of other offers."

And as to George Holroyd, she was sending him a much more suitable bride—a handsome, lively, accomplished girl, who would be a credit to him anywhere—who could sing, and act, and dress and dance—and was just cut out for an officer's wife. She would despatch her with a first-rate outfit, and once actually *en route*, once landed in Bombay—George *must* marry her.

The short notice he had given, and his bare allusion to a name in the letter, were high trumps in her hand, and she meant to play a very bold game. Once Belle had started, it would be *après Belle le déluge*; she did not care what Belle's bridegroom thought of *her*. She would write and give him her very distinct reasons for this arrangement. She would say that she could not spare Betty, who was too young and inexperienced, and for whom she had other views, and that sooner than disappoint him altogether, she had despatched her own daughter, who was far more fitted for society and to shine as his wife; that she wanted a good husband and a good home for Belle; for she was a dying woman, and that he must try and forgive her—if not, she would endeavour to do without his forgiveness as best she could.

"I shall pretend that the letters came by second post," she said, as she rose and rang for hot water—and when her toilette was completed, she nerved

herself for the first move in a very difficult, delicate undertaking. She took a double dose of sal volatile, and opening her blotter, she sat down and carefully re-examined Mr. Holroyd's love letter, and the word Betty. What was she to do with it? A penknife would show on such thin paper; happy thought! a blot. It would have one or two companions, for the epistle had apparently been written in great haste. She raised a well-laden pen, and carefully let fall a good-sized drop, on the word "Betty."

Did this hard-hearted old woman suspect that she was blotting out the poor girl's happiness at the same moment? When her task was complete, and the ink looked quite nice and dry, and natural, she nerved herself for her next move. She took a long sniff at her smelling-salts, and sent for Belle.

"Belle," she said, as that young lady strolled indolently into the room, "I've had a letter"

"Have you?" indifferently. "Not Madame Josephine's bill."

"No, no, my dear, quite the contrary, a pleasant letter from India—from Mr. Holroyd. He has written to me to say that his prospects are much improved—and that he can afford to marry now,"

Belle, who had been staring incredulously at her mother, with a rigid white face, twitching lips, and widely dilated black eyes, seized her arm in a grip of steel and said breathlessly; "To marry whom, mother, quickly—quickly?"

If Mrs. Redmond had had one lingering qualm of compunction, it was now dispelled by her daughter's overpowering agitation.

"Why—why *you* my darling, who else?"

Belle gave a faint cry, and threw herself into her embrace, and hugged her fiercely.

"Oh mother! mother, are you quite certain—certain?" she panted hysterically.

"Here is his letter, enclosed to me (she had destroyed the envelope) if you will only compose yourself, and read it, my darling."

Belle took it eagerly, without the smallest suspicion, and sitting down on the edge of the bed, read it over rapidly; her shaking fingers scarcely able to steady the page before her eyes. "And to go in a month—in a month," she repeated ecstatically, springing up and beginning to dance about the room, "Oh, I can scarcely believe it, I scarcely know what I am doing; it's too good to be true."

"Yes," thought the old lady, as she watched her intently. Belle, for whom she had slaved and intrigued, and schemed, and slandered, and perilled her very soul, would leave her in four weeks' time, knowing that she would never see her again, and would leave her with scarcely a pang. Anything for change, anything for excitement, anything to get away from Noone!

"I can hardly realise it, mother, it is such a surprise this dismal morning. I never was so happy in my life, not even that time when I was engaged to Major Evans, and we thought he had four thousand a year; he had a tubby figure and a red nose. You see he invites Mossoo, and I used to think he did not like him. It's well he mentioned my treasure, for I could not have been parted from him. 'Love me, love my dog.' And about my trousseau? You will give me a good one, won't you, like a dear old mammy?" she said, confronting her parent with sparkling eyes, "I can do the millinery myself if I have time. I have so often thought it over, and made lists in my mind, and I know exactly what I want—for it has always been the dream of my life to go to India. I shall want a saddle and habit, at least four ball-dresses, and a ruby velvet dinner dress, mammy darling, I *must* have that, and your old rose point, and sable tails,

and the diamond brooch that was your grandmother's. You know you won't be going out, once you have got *me* off your hands, and I shall want teagowns, and tailor-made dresses, and dozens of boots and shoes—and only a month!" and she paused in her walk, and gesticulated with her arms, like a figure in a ballet.

"Yes, only a month," echoed her mother, sadly.

"He is very nice and very good-looking, isn't he?" she continued. "I shall not be ashamed when I am asked to point out my husband."

"No," assented her parent, absently.

"I had always an idea that he liked me, although he *was* so self-contained. Those are the sort of men who have deepest feelings. He was terribly cut up the day he went away, but he was very reserved, and never said anything straight out. He seems in a great hurry *now*," and she laughed triumphantly. "Does he not? There's the telegram," glancing at the letter, "I shall send it off sharp, and put the poor fellow out of his suspense. Oh! isn't he fond of me? The telegram will cost a good deal; give me your purse, dear, and I'll send Betty up the town. I wonder what Betty will say?"

Yes, indeed, what would Betty say?

"I'll go this moment and tell her," she rattled on, with brilliant eyes and heightened colour, and she quitted the room with a buoyant step, and ran downstairs, leaving her mother seated in her arm-chair, with a bowed head, and a heavy heart.

How would Betty bear the blow? And what a pretty creature Belle was, when in good spirits; how easily elated, or cast down.

If it had been Belle who was to stay behind, and Betty that had been going?—she dared not allow her mind to dwell on that awful alternative. "Yes, yes," she muttered, as she rose and straight-

ened her cap at the glass, and surveyed her own anxious white face. "A mother's first duty is to her own flesh and blood, and my conscience tells me that I have done mine."

Mrs. Redmond's conscience !

CHAPTER XVIII.

"YES, COMING."

"To bear is to conquer our fate."

—CAMPBELL.

BETTY had been out in the garden, gathering a harvest of flowers, whilst her three companions raced one another round the gravel walks, or rollicked among the cabbages, and she had now returned with an armful of roses, carnations and geraniums, to where all the empty vases in the house were paraded on the study table, awaiting her attention. They were soon filled from the pile of flowers. Betty had dainty, tasteful fingers, and knew how to apply a bud here and to insert a bit of fern there. She took up a late yellow rose quite tenderly, and gave it the honour of a glass to itself, and set it off with one or two pretty shaded leaves. Had George her rose still? The one she had pulled from the old cloth-of-gold tree, now so many months ago. He had said a year, and a year had elapsed; it was a year and two months since that summer afternoon, when, as she came in from picking strawberries she found him waiting for her at the end of the long walk. Oh, and her heart beat quickly at the thought, if she had only seen him standing there, when she opened the garden gate to-day! Not that she doubted him for one second; no, she turned her bangle on her arm, and told herself she would trust him, and wait for him, if she lived for fifty years.

"Betty, Betty, Betty," screamed Belle, coming dashing through the drawing-room, like a whirlwind. "Where are you? News, news, and such news," embracing her and hugging her till she was almost suffocated. "Do put down those wretched flowers, and listen to what I am going to tell you. Something so very nice," she added with her usual rapid utterance.

Betty stuck a piece of geranium in a glass, and turned to her cousin with an expectant smile.

"Mother has had a letter from George Holroyd."

Here Betty became rather white.

"It came by the second post; his uncle has made him an allowance, and he can afford to marry *now*. He has friends going to India next month, and so he has written home for—guess who?" pushing her cousin away playfully with both hands and looking at her with a pair of brilliant, excited eyes. Betty gazed back at her with a stare of awful suspense, and almost held her breath.

"For *me!*" cried Belle, and she broke into a hysterical peal of laughter. Betty felt as if her heart had stopped. Her senses seemed to be suddenly benumbed; there was a dimness over her eyes. "Isn't it splendid?" continued Belle exultantly, still holding her cousin by the wrists. "Am I not a lucky girl? Oh, what a change in one's life a little bit of paper and a few strokes can make"—(Yes, poor Betty, what a change indeed!)

"And is it quite certain—are you sure?" she stammered with a curious catching of her breath.

"As sure as I am standing here, my dear child! Here's his letter, you may read it if you like!"

"Oh, no! no!" averting her face with a kind of shuddering sigh. Belle in her innocence was turning the knife in the wound.

"Why, Bet! What's this, are you not glad? Bet, don't be silly, you won't miss me so *very* much, you have plenty of friends, and perhaps, if you are good, I shall send for you some day to come out and live with us. Eh—why don't you speak? I thought you would have been delighted!"

"It is all so sudden," faltered the domestic martyr in a strange voice, "and—and of course," turning her white face bravely on her cousin, "I am glad you are so happy," but she might have been a different girl, so changed was she.

"Then look glad, my dear! and kiss me, my Queen Elisabeth. My! how icy cold you are this broiling afternoon, a walk will warm you."

Belle was far too pre-occupied with her own happiness to take serious notice of her cousin's deadly pallor.

"I want you to go into town on an errand for me at once. I have so much to do, and think of, and so very little time. I feel completely bewildered. First of all, I must write to those friend's of George's by this post on account of taking my passage. *He* pays for it; is he not generous? And I am to send him a wire. Look here, do you think this will do?" producing a bit of paper on which was pencilled:

"George Holroyd, Mangobad, India Yes, coming."

"Six words at four shillings and sixpence a word, no need to put who it is from. *He* knows," and she laughed triumphantly. "It will come to one pound seven; here is the family purse; will you send it at once, and write it on the proper office form?"

"Yes," responded Betty with an effort, her throat felt so hard and dry,

"Now don't be so dull and grumpy, Bet! Do you think distance will make any difference to me? Do you think I shall ever forget you? I shall miss you frightfully. Who will bring me my tea, spell my notes, and help me to do up my dresses, and pack my clothes? When you are up the street you might run into Dooley's and tell them they are not to do a stitch of plain work for any one but me for the next month. I will go in to-morrow and speak to them myself."

"Very well," said her listener mechanically.

"Now I must run and write to these Calvert people, and to lots of others, and give them ample time to forward desirable wedding presents. To intimate friends I shall send round a list of what I require. I hope Miss Dopping will give me something good, *you* might suggest a handsome dressing bag—fitted of course."

"And won't you write to Mrs. Malone?"

"Not I," scornfully. "She can wait. No doubt she has had an inkling of this all along, and that was why she was always so very cool to me. *You* are her favourite, Betty; only for supporting her and Cuckoo, and her good-for-nothing son, poor George would have married me a year ago. I believe he made them over every penny of his private means; however, they have seen the last of *our* money."

Betty noted the plural, and how glibly it came tripping off the bride-elect's lips.

"Well, I must fly, or the post will be going without my despatches. How wild Annie Carr will be! I shall write to her at once. I shall write to tell her that I am going to marry a handsome, rich young officer, who adores me, and is counting the very seconds till I join him in India! Poor Annie, her day is over. I feel as if my sun were just rising," and she passed into the hall singing.

Who can picture Betty—let them picture her, as she stood alone in the middle of the room, with pale dry lips, and a face like marble. Suddenly she sat down, and laid her arms on the table, and leant her throbbing head on them. All she wanted was time to think, to pull herself together, to try and understand what it meant; no tear trickled down her face—a face miserable and quivering with anguish. What did it all mean? What *did* it mean? It meant that George Holroyd, “Gentleman George” as Fred Moore said he was called, her *preux chevalier*, her model of all that was unselfish, and noble, and manly, had proved to be a very poor specimen of chivalry after all. He had merely been amusing himself with her, an ignorant, simple-minded little country chit! It was true that he had not told his love in so many words, his proposal at the garden gate had been a parable, but had that bangle no meaning? Nor a little bunch of forget-me-nots on a Christmas card, nor the kiss he had imprinted on her hand, nor the look in his eyes when they had parted? Had not irrepressible, chattering Cuckoo, plainly informed her that she was sure George worshipped the ground she stood on, and although she had feebly silenced her, Cuckoo had persisted in declaring that he had removed her photograph from the Bridgetstown album; and—and—and it all meant *nothing*. She was only a stupid, silly little country girl, and he had been in love with her cousin all along. It was to her, he wrote constantly, she had evidently expected this summons to join him. Pretty, fascinating, well-dressed Belle! and yet how often had he quitted Belle to speak to her? To dwell on these cherished memories was folly now; he was going to marry Belle, and she must stifle her feelings and seem *glad*. Her brief dream of happiness was over, was gone for ever; before

her stretched the old monotonous existence, with nothing but a blank, hopeless future. All the light had gone out of her life—quenched in a moment by a careless hand. Suddenly she heard Belle's step approaching, and what a light and happy contrast, to her usual dragging heavy gait.

"What!" she cried, "not gone yet! Oh, do hurry and send off the telegram. George said he would expect it so anxiously, and moments to *you* are hours to him! I want you to get me five shillings' worth of stamps. How queer and strange you look; certainly such sudden news *is* stunning. Here is your hat, you will do very well, come, be off."

And she hastily escorted her to the hall door, and saw her down the avenue, accompanied by the three delighted dogs (Mossoo preferred the fire, and the other dogs preferred his room to his company). As Betty walked along, smiling and nodding to many acquaintances—for it had been market day—she was by no means a bad imitation of the Spartan boy and fox. She was suffering her first keen agonising grief, and wore a white but cheerful countenance. Oh! what would she not give to be able to run away and hide herself in the woods, and there alone have it out with this stabbing pain that seemed to be tearing at her very heart strings. She wended her way to the post office, and wrote out Belle's message on a telegram form. Strange fate! that hers should be the hand to extinguish her own best hopes!

Miss Bolland, the post-mistress and Ballingoole daily news, of which Maria Finny was the supplement, observed more than most people, and noticed how pale Betty was, and how her hand shook as she guided the pen, and remarked upon it, with her usual uncompromising frankness.

"It's the change in the weather," replied the girl

mendaciously. "This close weather is trying, and I am sure there is thunder in the air."

"Dear me, do you say so! I'm that nervous in a thunderstorm, on account of the telegraph wires. Well, miss, you do look poorly, I must say."

"A telegram to *India*," as Betty handed it to her; "we never sent one there before."

'George Holroyd, Mangobad, India,
Yes, coming.'

Now reading it aloud with inexpressible unction.

"From *you*, Miss Betty?" with a quick glance.

"Oh no, but it is of no consequence whom it is from. It need not be wired. *He* knows."

"Yes—but I must know, too," returned Jane Bolland rather sharply, "otherwise I can't send it."

"Miss Redmond sends it," said Betty quietly.

"Oh, indeed. So I was thinking; yes, coming to Mr. Holroyd. Oh, of course. It will be one pound seven shillings. Thank you, miss, it shall be despatched at once. I quite understand its importance. *Good* evening."

In less than five minutes, Jane had darted out with a shawl over her head, to impart the great news to Mrs. Maccabe—who lived next door but one,—and before the shops were closed, all Ballingoole was in possession of the intelligence, that Miss Redmond was going to India to be married to Mr. Holroyd—and no one was the least surprised, except Miss Dopping and Betty.

CHAPTER XIX.

"FOXY JOE TELLS MORE TALES, AND ONE FALSEHOOD."

"These two hated with a hate
Found only on the Stage."

—BYRON.

"THERE goes old Sally, hot foot out to Noone to hear the news and to set them all by the ears!"

In this agreeable manner did Maria Finny notify the fact to her mother; Maria, who was cautiously peering over the blind, just merely showing the top of her grey head, and her grey eyebrows — not staring out with a bold and undaunted gaze, like her opposite neighbour.

"There she goes," she repeated, "and half the beggars in the town after her." For once Miss Finny's surmise was correct. Miss Dopping had hardly been able to credit her senses when she was told of Belle's engagement. She must have it from the fountain-head, she must hear it from the bride elect's own lips.

With her, impulse meant action, and at the unusual hour of eleven o'clock in the morning she had put on her bonnet and shawl, and seized her umbrella, and posted out to cross-examine the Redmonds, root and branch. On the canal bridge just beyond the town, she encountered Belle herself—also afoot at an unusually early hour—walking into Ballingoole with a brisk step and beaming face, to give orders about her outfit, to post some glowing letters, and to receive the congratulations of the community. With present contentment in her heart, re-assured vanity

whispering in her ear, and (as she firmly believed) a delightful future before her, everything seemed *couleur de rose*; even Ballingoo, hated Ballingoo, looked quite pretty, as it sloped towards the canal, showing a series of sunny old gardens, brilliant with gay August flowers, their crumbling grey walls almost hidden by a wealth of autumn fruit. Even detestable old Sally Dopping, as she paused on the top of the high "fly" bridge, and leant on her redoubtable umbrella, looked less like a malevolent old witch, and more like a generous, good fairy, who would bring a valuable wedding present in her hand! And as to the Mahons, Finneys, Maccabes, she really felt quite fond of them—now that she was going to leave them—and she had not the smallest doubt in her own mind, that they would all sincerely regret her departure.

But Belle, could she but see herself as others saw her, was not popular in the neighbourhood.

The Irish are quick to discern character, and are, when they choose, incisive and severe critics. Belle was judged to be a smart, dashing young woman, but hot tempered and stingy, and had never been known to give a copper to any one—not even the poor "dark" man by the post office steps. "She is not fit to open the door to Miss Betty. She will be as fat as her mother yet, and every bit as mane!" Such was the village verdict.

"Well, Miss Dopping," she exclaimed, "you are out early. I suppose you have heard my news?"

"So then it is you!" was the rather ungracious reply.

"Of course," with a smile of triumphant complacency, "and what do you say to it?"

"Umph—say to it; I say better late than never!"

"Oh," with an angry laugh, but determined not to lose her temper, "come now, Miss Dopping, you would not have said that if it had been Betty!"

"No—how could I? And she only nineteen? Look here, Isabella, you know I never mince my words, do I? I always thought it *was* Betty. I say so plainly to your face, and I suppose I must be dropping into my second childhood, for I declare I certainly thought by the looks of that young fellow, that he was desperately in love with her, and it seemed to me, when I'd seen them riding together side by side, so handsome and so happy, that the Lord made them for one another! Will you swear to me here on the top of Balingoole Bridge, that there has been no bamboozling about letters, and no trickery of any kind?"

Such an insinuation was more than the expectant bride elect could tamely bear—even from rich Miss Dopping.

"I swear to you that there has not," returned Belle, glaring at her with her face and eyes in flame, and literally trembling with fury.

"You wicked old woman; you may see his letters if you like! Of course I know that you are horribly annoyed to find that anyone could prefer *me* to Betty; it's lucky for me that there are not many Miss Doppings in the world! Thank goodness, I have plenty of friends, and always been a favourite wherever I have been."

"Oh, of course," agreed the old lady drily, "we all know that your mother reared an angel; but Betty has no mother, and none to put in a word for her but me. I have asked you a plain question privately, and you have given me my answer, and there is an end of it."

"And are you satisfied, because *that* is so very important?" sneered Belle, with an expression on her face that rendered it downright ugly.

"Well, I am satisfied that you are telling me the truth," she returned evasively; "and since it is so, you are getting a very good match, for a good son will be a good husband. I wish you joy and I need detain you no longer. I'll just go on to Noone, since I *am* this far."

Belle, whose feathers had been considerably ruffled by this encounter, found her good spirits and self-approval return, as she visited in turn the post office, the Finneys and the Dooleys. She was the heroine of the hour, and enjoyed her brief triumph. The Dooleys, who kept a draper's shop and the dressmakers' establishment, and who had a keen eye to future orders, although they had had stormy passages with Belle (but who had not?) laid on congratulations and flattery, so to speak with a trowel, and she was figuratively plastered over with compliments by the time she arrived at Mrs. Maccabe's with a small domestic order.

"And so they tell me you're going to the Indes, Miss?" said the widow as she carefully pared and trimmed four loin chops, operating on them quite in a fashion after Mrs. Redmond's own heart. "Ye'll like that, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have all my life longed to go to India?"

"I hear them's very ondacent people out there and wears next to no clothes! And they don't ate no mate in them countries, I am told, but *that* will suit you finely! You won't have no butcher's bill, but will be living on bread and rice. Faix," with a wheezy laugh, "you are not like my cat, that died of an Ash-Wednesday, because he could not face the Lent! Well, Miss, I wish yourself and the gentleman every luck, and that ye may live long, and die happy."

"Thank you, Mrs. Maccabe. I think we shall suit one another," returned Belle, complacently,

"I'm glad it wasn't Miss Betty he sent for; we could not spare *her* just yet, though no doubt she will be going from us some of these days, too, and it will be a lucky man that takes her. Get out of that, Joey," to Foxy Joe; "what are ye waitin' for? why don't ye take them ribs up to the Glebe when ye know they dine at two o'clock."

"I was just waiting on Miss Redmond to give her joy! You will not forget poor Joey, Miss—will ye?" And he eyed her with an expression of latent cunning.

Belle glanced at him scornfully, and made no reply.

"You will remember the hand I had in it, won't ye, Miss?" he repeated in a louder key.

"I don't know what you are talking about," returned Belle, haughtily, now preparing to leave the shop, which was filling fast with respectable customers.

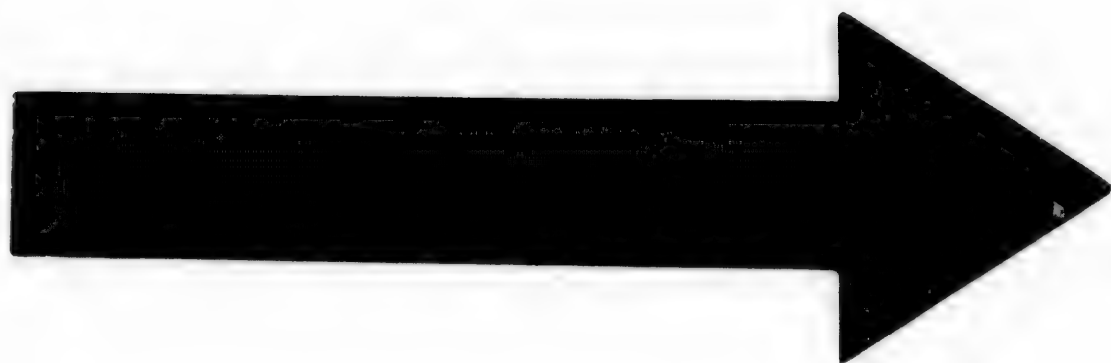
Foxy Joe, who, I am sorry to say, had already been at Nolan's, partaking of an early glass, and had imbibed what is generally known as the "cross drop," was not to be thus set aside.

"Sure, I am talking of all the love letters I carried for you, Miss," he answered in an angry scream, "when *he* was at home. Begorra, ye were a terrible young lady with the pen! as many as four to his wan, and I was always to wait for an answer; bedad, *he* was not in the same hurry! And ye never give me a copper, not a hate but an old necktie, and promises—Faix!—ye must make it up to me *now*."

Here a violent clout from Mrs. Maccabe's oxtail reduced him to a whimpering silence, and then he roared out:

"And can't ye let me alone, and what harm am I doing ye—Bridgey Maccabe?"

"How dar *ye* spake to your betters like that,



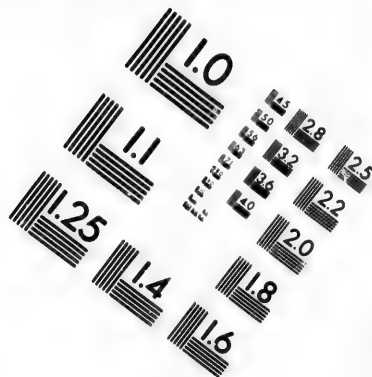
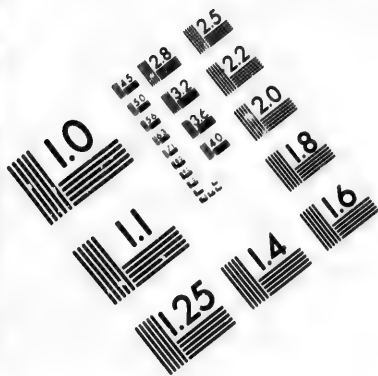
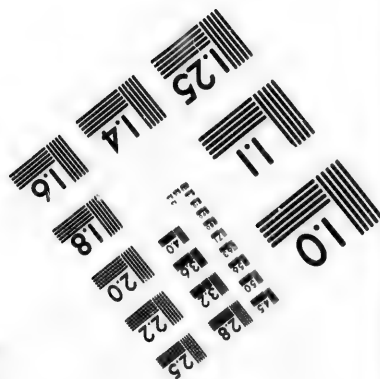
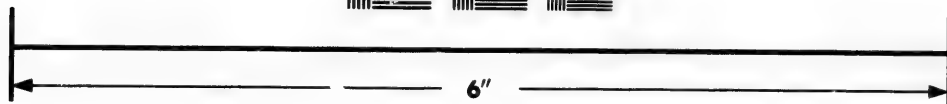
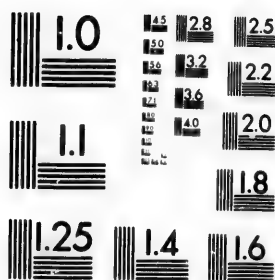


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ye dirty little tell-tale whelp?" she demanded furiously. "I'll have to get shut of ye, I'm thinking—body—sleeves—and trimmings."

"Never mind him," interrupted Belle, whose voice shook with passion. "Take no notice on *my* account, Mrs. Maccabe. He's only a fool; no one pays any attention to his lies."

"Lies!" screamed Joey, "lies am I telling? I'm telling lies, am I? Well, I'll tell a good one when I go about it—*you're a lady!*"

At this Mrs. Maccabe laid hold of her foaming, stuttering retainer, and shook him like a rat, whilst Belle, holding her head very erect, and carrying the four chops in a small basket, stalked out of the shop with all the dignity she could muster, and her face in a flame!

Poor Belle! this world is full of disappointments, even when one's affairs wear a most smiling aspect; her little triumphal expedition into town, had not been quite as satisfactory, as she had anticipated.

CHAPTER XX.

"THE BRIDE ELECT."

"Was ever maid so used as I?"

—UPTON.

THE days that ensued, how busy they were, and how fast they flew. Mrs. Redmond, with a deadened conscience and an active brain, fired up into a final blaze of energy and intrigue. She drew out—although it was as agonising as extracting her teeth—a considerable amount of her savings, to pay for Belle's extravagant outfit. It was one of her few remaining pleasures to see her idol fittingly adorned, and to superintend dress rehearsals of future social triumphs.

She dashed off dozens of letters to her former friends, announcing her daughter's approaching wedding in fitting terms; and, as Belle was apparently making an excellent match, presents followed in thick and fast. Mrs. Malone endowed her future relative with her own wedding veil. Cuckoo sent a case of scissors, Miss Dopping a looking-glass in an antique silver frame with a bye word to Betty, that "it would remind the bride of what she loved best in the world." And there were many other offerings, from a small diamond brooch to a large silver button-hook, and on the whole Belle considered that she had done remarkably well. Betty was invaluable at this period. She planned and sewed, and toiled from morning till night, and was quite feverishly busy—in constant bodily occupation was her only opiate for mental anguish. The shock of the first realisation of George's baseness, had resolved itself into a continuous ache, that would always stir and throb as long as his memory might rouse her pride; her lover had forsaken her, and the bitterness of abandonment was in her heart. Many people remarked that she was looking thin and out of spirits, that her eyes were hollow, and her laugh was rare, but attributed this—including the fair damsel herself—to Belle's approaching departure. She accompanied her radiant cousin, in wild and hasty raids on Dublin shops. She folded and unfolded, tried on and altered, many of the smart gowns that came pouring in by the carrier's cart. She "hurried up" the Dooleys, and the hum of her sewing machine might be heard for hours. But late at night, whilst Belle slept soundly, and dreamt happy dreams of India, at the other side of the thin partition wall, Betty, wrapped in a white dressing-gown, and with streaming hair, was wandering restlessly up and down, and flinging herself on her knees with clasped

and outstretched hands. "He has forgotten," she would murmur—"Oh, if *I* could but forget," and then she would sob—repressed strangling sobs, lest the sound should penetrate to her sleeping cousin. No wonder that she looked pale and haggard, and very different from the gay and beaming Betty of a year ago!

She worked very hard, whilst restless, excitable Belle found a number of excellent reasons for doing nothing, and roamed about the house, singing snatches of songs, and waltzes, and talking incessantly of India, herself and George. "It's a curious thing, Betty," she remarked one day, as she lolled beside her busy companion, "that, although George was so desperately fond of me, as *you* know, he never said anything, never even hinted at an offer, or committed himself by word or look; and I am sure I gave him heaps of openings. Do you remember how *i* used to sing:

'Si vous n'avez rien à me dire.'

And she laughed a shameless laugh.

"I told him over and over again, that it was the dream of my life to see India, and yet he never said one syllable, he did not think it honourable to ask a girl to share a life of poverty. No wonder they call him 'Gentleman George,' eh?"

"No wonder!" echoed Betty rather faintly.

"I am so glad he likes *you*, Bet, he often said so, and always sent you messages in his letters, kind remembrances and that sort of thing. Some day you must come out and pay us a visit. I am certain you would marry well out in India, where girls are scarce; you have such lots of 'go' in you, and really your eyes and figure are not so bad. I believe George rather admired you!"

"Tell me one thing, Belle," said the other, shielding with her hand her poor quivering face.

"Do you love him very much? I know he is not your first love."

"Pooh!" interrupted the bride elect, "nor my twenty-first; I had my first lover at eleven years of age, a delightful school-boy, who ruined himself in lockets and chocolates for my sake, and now at twenty-nine (though I don't look it) I have my last, I suppose! I don't believe in frantic love, such as you read of in books, where girls walk about all night wringing their hands and weeping,"—Betty became scarlet—"and where men—well, now I come to think of it—the men don't care! they swear they will shoot themselves, and they fall in love with the next pretty face. Love, such as poets rave about, blazes up quickly like straw, and then goes out, and leaves unpleasant ashes; great emotions wear people down, and age them frightfully."

"If you don't believe in love, what do you believe in?" said Betty, suddenly laying down her work.

"I believe in a presentable, gentlemanly husband, with good connections, and a full purse. I believe in gold, incense and freedom. I believe in a delightful life in India, in lots of amusement and going about, I——"

"But——" began her listener interrogatively.

"Yes, I know what you are going to say, of course I like George very much, but not so much as *he* likes me. That is always the way; one is saddled and bridled, and the other is booted and spurred—I infinitely prefer the latter *rôle*! Look at Mrs. Malone! Of course *she* was a fool, but what a life she led. Well, she will be a harmless mother-in-law, that's one comfort! Only think, Bet, this day week I shall be on the high seas, and this day month I shall probably be Mrs. Holroyd, and you will no longer be Miss Betty, but Miss

Redmond. I have promised mother to send a wire, so that it may appear in the papers at once. I always think it looks so well and so important, to see an announcement concluding with 'By Telegram.'"

Mrs. Redmond seemed entirely oblivious of the part she had enacted in the domestic drama, and treated the engagement as if it were quite a *bond fide* affair, and had possibly brought herself to believe that it was so. She received numerous visitors, to whom she expatiated eloquently on the ancestors, and the acres, of the Holroyds, and the great match Belle was making—to which plain-spoken Miss Dopping had remarked, that it might turn out to be a *Lucifer* match yet!—and I am truly concerned to add, was disagreeably exultant to the mothers of unmarried daughters. Her conscience was now, so to speak, dead. She had assured it, in its last dying struggles, that she was merely doing evil that good might come. What was a lie? merely an intellectual evasion of a difficulty! She had lied to Belle, boldly and successfully, and were she to confess now, and repair her error, Belle would perhaps end her days in a mad house. She had only given destiny a little push, that was all!

In spite of Dr. Moran's angry expostulations, Mrs. Redmond made a great effort, and accompanied her daughter to London, saw her on board the *Nankin* in the Victoria Docks, handed her over to the charge of Colonel and Mrs. Calvert, and then bade her good-bye for ever. Belle hugged her and kissed her many times, and wept herself to the very verge of hysterics, but her tears were dry, and she had smoothed her hair, and changed her hat, and was chatting merrily—long before the *Nankin* had passed Gravesend.

Her day, she told herself, was just rising, and

she was resolved to make the most of it, whilst the poor old lady, rumbling back to London in a four-wheeler, and sobbing as if her heart would break, felt that her life was over—she had practically done with existence when she closed the door of Belle's cabin.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE UNEXPECTED."

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate."

THE *Nankin* was favoured with splendid weather, and palpitated eastward at the rate of fifteen knots an hour, between a cobalt blue sky, and a mirror-like sea. The globe-trotting season had set in with unusual severity, and there were two hundred and fifty passengers on board, including about seventy ladies, and among these Miss Redmond was singled out as one of the most fascinating spins! Yes—she was already tasting the delights for which she had so long languished. Her bright dark eyes, animated manners, pretty frocks, and pretty figure, met with general approval, and she anticipated her wedding day by displaying a goodly portion of her trousseau, and embarked on a series of vivacious flirtations.

To do her justice, they were above board, and comparatively harmless, and from the grey-haired captain to a smooth-faced sub-lieutenant she had many slaves. She changed her cavaliers almost as often as her toilettes, and yet the ladies bore her no ill-will, nor did they discourse of her in whispers, as they did of that *other* syren, who smoked cigarettes behind the wheel-house—not alone. Belle implored Mrs. Calvert in eager piteous accents not to divulge the fact that she was going out to be married to Mr. Holroyd.

"Why not, my dear? I think any girl might be proud to be engaged to George Holroyd," protested George's friend.

"Oh, of course, but I want to enjoy myself, and have a little fun before my wings are clipped. Look at those two engaged girls in charge of the Captain! How dreadfully dull and dowdy they are; you would not wish me to be like *them*?"

But if Belle was not going out to India to change her name, why were all her boxes and belongings branded I. F. H., and on one tell-tale trunk was actually painted in bold white letters "Mrs. George Holroyd." Her secret was well known (the other girls took care of *that*), and she was as plainly marked "engaged" as any reserved railway carriage. She had soon many particular lady friends, and of admirers a great host; with everything she had ever coveted in her wardrobe, with India before her, and nothing to do, but talk and laugh, and dress, and flirt, Belle was, for once in her life, a thoroughly happy woman. She had nothing to wish for—no, not even the presence of George! He might object to her acting with Count Calincourt, and might possibly misunderstand her friendship with Mr. Beaufort, a rich M.P., who paid her immense attention, and, when they landed at Malta, had loaded her with half the contents of Borg's shop. She had a callous heart, a faultless digestion, and a torpid conscience. To her eager, volatile disposition, the act of forgetfulness was second nature, and she never cast a retrospective glance to her own detested past, and but few to Noone and its occupants; *En avant* was her mental war-cry! Her morning *début* on deck was a sort of triumphal procession from the companion ladder to her chair! At least half a dozen swains were in her train. One carried her pillow, another her book, a third her fan, a fourth

her scent bottle ; the ladies, too, were deeply interested in her arrival ; they were on the *qui vive* to see what new and beautiful raiment she would wear, and she always looked as trim and smart as if she had stepped out of a bandbox. It was nothing to this appreciative, nodding, smiling circle, that she had left the cabin she shared with Mrs. Calvert, Miss Gay, and another, in a deplorable condition. Her belongings, such as brushes, combs, shoes, hair-pins, gowns, strewn broadcast, within very narrow limits. Enough for them, that the effect of her labours was excellent, and a few pretty apologies and a little bit of "butter" were ample payment in her opinion for Miss Rose Gay, who was tidying, folding, and evolving order out of chaos below.

Belle looked so pretty, and chatted so pleasantly, that she was a general favourite. She was the mainspring of amusement, too ; she taught games, gave riddles, sang delightfully on the moonlit deck, to the accompaniment of a guitar, acted admirably, and gave readings ; got up Mrs. Jarley's waxworks, and was quite a leading spirit on board the *Nankin*. And if she was a little untidy in the cabin, and now and then made thoughtless speeches—who is perfect ?

Her dog "Mossoo" was not quite so popular, although he also entertained his fellow-travellers by walking on his head, waltzing and dying. His mistress made such a fuss about him, insisted on having him to sleep in her berth, kept up a continual commotion about his food, allowed him to lie on other people's chairs, and clipped him with other people's scissors. He was not a pleasant poodle and took no pains to make himself agreeable. He was self-conscious, affected, and vain. He had a little brown snub nose, round reddish-brown eyes—that seemed full of wicked

thoughts—and a mole on his upper lip, not concealed by his moustache, which gave him a sneering supercilious expression. He appeared to be saying: "But *you* are only human beings, I am an accomplished French poodle." Most people like dogs, but "Mossoo" made no friends. He was despised by the ship cat, detested by the crew, and was once stigmatised by an angry steward as "a lazy good-for-nothing brute, who slept all day, and ate like a *passenger*." As the voyage wore on, Miss Redmond's popularity became a little threadbare. She talked too much, and, in her eager desire to cater for listeners, she sometimes said things that were best omitted, made daring little jokes at the expense of other ladies, related amusing anecdotes that were for the benefit of the cabin—not the deck. Some of the men (seasoned old Indians), who were acquainted with George Holroyd, made polite advances to his bewitching little black-eyed bride—and were smilingly repulsed when they spoke of him. She merely laughed, and shrugged her shoulders, carelessly, and changed the subject; and subsequently they shrugged *their* shoulders, and wondered what a smart fellow like Holroyd, such a popular chap, and good all round, could see in that chattering, flighty, over-dressed doll.

Mrs. Calvert (Belle's chaperon) was a slight, refined, rather worn looking woman, who had left four young children at home, and was following her husband's fortune's, whilst her sister, Miss Gay, accompanied her—possibly in quest of her own. She was plain, but so neat and smart that she was almost pretty; clever, bright, and amiable—and both sisters were unmistakably ladies in every sense of the word. These two, and another, shared Belle's cabin. It was not as if *she* shared theirs, for the whole of that restricted apartment was pervaded by her belongings, from gloves and shoes

to "Mossoo's" coat, collar and bones. In such narrow quarters, one is not long in discovering the true character of one's fellow-passenger; there is no better opportunity for mutual insight, and many a lasting feud or friendship has been born in a four-berthed cabin! Belle began well: she was affectionate to Mrs. Calvert and her sister (and agreeable to Miss Cox—who made up the quartette), insisting on Miss Gay calling her by her Christian name, and effusive with offers of scent, face lotions, and various loans of small articles, eager to do every one's hair, eager to alter people's hats—in fact most anxious to ingratiate herself—and she succeeded. She kissed Mrs. Calvert—in spite of that lady—and wound her arm round Miss Gay's waist or leant upon her as they paced the deck in the twilight. But by-and-bye, capricious Belle found "other fish to fry." Her head was a little turned by her unusual social success; she became less demonstrative in her affection, and alas! alas! her temper began to be seen! One day it appeared in great force in the cabin, as they were dressing for dinner, all somewhat hot and hurried.

"Did you see that horrid Mr. Noakes throwing "Mossoo" out of his chair," she said, "as if the poor dog was doing any harm? Mr. Noakes is a detestable cad! A regular 'Arry.'"

"He is a friend of mine," said Miss Cox stiffly, "and I beg you not to call him names."

"Stuff," exclaimed Belle, with the light of battle on her face, "I can't help your having cads for friends, this is a free ship! I shall say what I please, I shall say *more*—birds of a feather flock together."

"You shall not say those sort of things to *me*," returned the other, not knowing with whom she had to cope, nor that it was a fatal mistake to

argue with Miss Redmond ; but argue she did, and she had the best of the dispute, whilst Mrs. Calvert and her sister were the miserable witnesses to a quarrel that would have disgraced the Kilkenny cats ! Miss Redmond, boiling over with ungovernable fury, gave her too ready opponent, a smart slap on the face with the back of a hair brush, a slap that left a *mark*—a mark that was shown to the Captain—and after this, there was a somewhat constrained silence. Belle held her head high, and pretended that she did not care. Nor did she notice, later in the evening, how some of the ladies whispered and looked. This scene was the precursor of several of a similar type ; there were hot words, though no blows, in other places, and she missed her mother desperately on these occasions—her mother who had always officiated as her buffer and shield. These cruel people received her hysterical apologies so very, *very* coldly. By the time that Bombay lighthouse was in view, Belle's evanescent popularity had almost wholly disappeared. What would she have said, had she peeped over the shoulder of one of her former admirers, and seen the letter he was writing for the mail.

"We have lots of girls on board, some going out to be married, some on promotion, some pretty, some plain. A Miss Redmond takes the cake, as far as looks and frocks go. She plays the guitar and sings and acts and is coming out for amusement *only*, and means to go far. She has a truly tropical temper, and has embroiled herself with several of her sex, and for all her bright eyes, and many fascinations, I heartily pity the poor devil who is to marry her."

Yes, Belle's temper had as usual been her social bane, and most of the ladies who were her fellow-passengers (forgetting all her pretty time-killing

efforts) spoke of her subsequently in their several circles as "that awful creature we came out with, on board the *Nankin*." Mrs. Calvert and her sister were silent, and circumspect, and by an immense outlay of tact and forbearance, managed to keep an unbroken peace, but they lived in a state of repressed nervous excitement, and more than once, were appealed to, and almost forced into a quarrel either with her or Miss Cox. Mrs. Calvert marvelled at what possessed George Holroyd to marry this shallow, restless, fiery little person, who rarely named him, and then with as much emotion, as if she were speaking of her washerwoman.

One afternoon, when she and her sister were leaning against the bulwarks watching the deep green water, and sheets of lace-like foam that fell away from the steamer's bows, they began to discuss their charge with bated breath.

"I cannot imagine what has happened to George Holroyd," exclaimed Mrs. Calvert. "How can he call her a simple little country girl," glancing across at Belle.

"Yes," returned her sister, "he must be very blindly in love, if he supposes her to be but nineteen."

"She looks quite ten years older—nearly as old as I am," said Mrs. Calvert.

"And so she is," replied Miss Gay. "I heard her talking of being at Ascot on a Cup day, and some one said, 'Why *that* horse ran eleven years ago.' She seemed so vexed, and said that she was taken by her mother when she was quite a little girl in short petticoats."

"I shall be truly thankful when this voyage is over! We have had fine weather certainly, but what storms—my nerves, I know, have all gone to pieces, but sometimes, Rosie, I tremble all over!"

"Now that she and Miss Cox don't speak it is better," said her sister consolingly.

"But Miss Cox's friends have all cut her, and so have several people. Oh ! I little knew, what I was undertaking," rejoined Mrs. Calvert with a groan.

"I wonder whether Mr. Holroyd knows what he is undertaking ?"

"Poor fellow I am sure he has no suspicion of her temper—I wish you had seen the letter he wrote to me about his pretty inexperienced young bride."

"Pretty, yes ; inexperienced, no ; young, no."

"He has married her for herself alone. She has not a fraction ; he actually paid for her passage. Her face is her sole fortune."

"If he could but see her in her true colours, I am sure he would thankfully furnish her with a return ticket," said Miss Gay briskly—"and there's the first bell, let us hurry down and get dressed before she appears upon the scene, for you know, we won't get *near* the glass ?"

The *Nankin* arrived in Bombay a few hours earlier than she was expected, and the steam launch which brought off the company's agent, various eager husbands, some servants to welcome old masters, and all the letters—did not bring George Holroyd.

The Calverts and their fair charge had been installed for some hours at Watson's Hotel before he made his appearance, and during that time, although the bride elect showed no anxiety, Mrs. Calvert was a prey to many misgivings.

Could he have heard of her quarrels and flirtations ? Could he have changed his mind at the eleventh hour ?

Belle, attired in a fresh and becoming toilette, was seated in the big verandah, surrounded by hopeful hawkers, and the cynosure of many admiring eyes. Some of her fellow-passengers

were also sitting, or standing about, and there was a whisper among them, that possibly Miss Redmond's bridegroom had cried off. They were all rather curious to see what manner of man he was, and his non-appearance occasioned some disappointment, and more excitement, now that an element of uncertainty was imported into the situation. But there was not the shadow of a cloud in Miss Redmond's face, as she turned over jewellery and silver articles with childish delight, and excitedly bargained for rugs and phool-carries for her future drawing-room. Hearing a sudden exclamation of joy and relief from Mrs. Calvert, she raised her eyes, and saw George ascending the stairs, and with a bound across a case of rings, and three silver sugar-bowls, she fluttered out to meet him.

He was greatly altered, he looked worn, thin, and haggard ; and he seemed to have aged ten years ; his neatly-fitting tight suit hung loosely on him, and his hands were as emaciated as if he had just recovered from a long illness.

He explained, when the first greetings were over with Belle and the Calverts, that his train had broken down on the Ghauts, entailing a delay of twelve hours, and after a short parley, Belle, who was not the least bashful, placed her arm frankly within his, and led him away through a staring circle, into the privacy of the ladies' sitting-room, —which happened to be empty.

"Well, George," she exclaimed, "here I am you see," and she put her hand on his shoulder, and gazed smilingly into his face.

Poor George, he had been nerving himself for this terrible interview for days, and the reality proved more than the anticipation.

"Yes, here you are, I see," and he kissed her. "I hope you have had a good passage?"

"Delightful, but what dreadfully short notice you gave me, and"—as if it had only just struck her—"how desperately ill you are looking. Were you afraid that I would not come?"

"I have had a very bad go of fever," he answered evasively. "And nothing knocks one over so quickly. I shall soon be all right."

"And how do you think I am looking?" she enquired coquettishly.

"Prettier than ever," he replied with promptitude, as he gazed dispassionately at his future wife—the wife that fate and Mrs. Redmond had sent him. She was really remarkably handsome, and appeared to be in the highest spirits, and utterly unconscious of her mother's baseness.

"I am charmed with India so far!" she said, "with the funny Parsees with their coal-scuttle hats, and the brown natives, the warm atmosphere, the big buildings, the Portuguese waiters, the hotel and the hawkers, in fact, with everything."

"I am very glad that India has made a good impression on you at first sight, and I hope you may never have any occasion to change your mind. I have got everything ready for you at Mangobad, and I think you will like your future home."

"I am certain I shall. Oh, George, you don't know how pleased I was to get your letter. How sly you were all along. I never could be *quite* sure that you cared for me, and I was very miserable; that dreadful life at Noone was killing me by inches. Here we have plenty of sun, and life and colour, and society and constant change. How happy we shall be!"

"I hope so, with all my heart," he answered gravely.

"But how quiet and silent and solemn you are; what has happened to you? Has India this effect on people? You look like a death's head."

"You must not mind me. I have not yet got over the fever ; it takes me some time to shake off. You must be gay enough for both of us," with a rather dreary smile. "And now tell me, how did you leave them all at home. I mean your mother—and—and—Betty," turning away so that she could not see his face.

"Mother saw me off herself, although she has been ailing a good deal, latterly ; she will miss me very much, but she will have Betty."

"But not for long," rather sharply.

"Well, I don't know ; if you mean about Ghosty Moore, of course they like one another, and the Moores are fond of Betty, but nothing is positively settled as yet. I would never have got off without her, never have been ready in time ; you really owe her a debt of gratitude, she worked almost day and night, and packed my boxes, and altered my dresses, and thought of every detail down to fans and oranges for the Red Sea. I shall miss her terribly. If there is any hitch about her marrying Ghosty Moore, we must have her out on a visit by-and bye, what do you think ?"

George became very white, and made no reply.

"I know you like her, for you have often said so, and she would not be with us very long. She would be sure to marry, though of late she has completely lost her looks, whether it was from a cold, or fretting at parting with me, or worrying herself about Ghosty, I cannot say, but she is really growing quite plain. Shall we have her out if the match does not come off ?"

"No. What puts her into your head just now ? You have scarcely arrived in India yourself."

"'No,' George, dear ; what are you saying ? 'No,' to me already ?"

"I think married people are best by themselves. You know the saying, 'Two are company, etc.'"

"How can you be so ridiculous ; as if poor Betty would be in the way any more than she was at Noone !"

"At any rate, your mother could not, spare her—even if there was no other reason."

"That is true, and I am certain Augustus Moore could not spare her either. Betty will be old Sally Dopping's heiress, and a great catch. Now let us go back to the others, I hate people to suppose that we are billing and cooing, it's so stupid. By the way, those two friends of yours, Mrs. Calvert and her sister, are a pair of detestable cats. I can't bear them, and I know they can't bear *me*. I shall be so glad when I am formally handed over to *you*. Come along now, they are making tea in the verandah, let us join the rest of the company," to which request George agreed with rather suspicious alacrity. That interview was over, and he had played his part pretty well. So he said to himself, as he wiped his pale forehead, and followed his unsuspecting fiancée out of the room. Sitting opposite to Belle, as she sipped her tea, and chattered volubly, he realised what a very pretty woman she was, especially when he contrasted her with various faded matrons, who were waiting for the next homeward-bound steamer. She had all the advantages of taste, and dress, and freshness.

She was "handsome, agreeable, and good-tempered," he assured himself, and he was doing what was right in his own eyes—and it might have been worse. Poor George !

CHAPTER XXII.

"'SHE' UNDERSTANDS ME."

GEORGE HOLROYD'S leave to England had borne but faint resemblance to the plan he had sketched out, as he steamed homewards, with his mind full of anticipations of sport, and amusement, and his pockets full of money. It is true that he had had some capital hunting (thanks to Clancy's grey, who was now in a racing stable), but his shooting and fishing projects, his visits to race-courses, his trip on the Continent, were still so many castles in the air. He was returning all but penniless, minus new clothes, new saddlery, a new battery of guns—minus his money, and, above all, minus his heart. What had he to show for his eight months' tour to Europe? One badly executed photograph—a cheap little silver brooch, and a withered flower, but these he valued beyond all price!

On the passage out, he was a dull enough companion, and took a very subordinate interest in smoking concerts, whist, or theatricals, and no interest whatever in various well-favoured young ladies; no, he paced the deck in solitude, revolving plans that might tend to his getting his foot upon the ladder that leads to good things and lofty positions, *i.e.*, "the staff." He must study the language in earnest, and pass the Higher Standard, so as to be eligible for an appointment that would give him an increase of pay, and enable him to make a home that would ~~not~~ be quite unworthy of Betty.

At Port Said he received a cheerful epistle from Belle; she wrote a good hand, and, like many

people who are not brilliantly intellectual, an excellent letter, if her orthography was not always above suspicion. She had the knack of giving interesting items of news in a short space, but among her whole budget there was not a word about her cousin—truly the play of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. After a rough passage through the south-west monsoon, Mr. Holroyd arrived in Bombay, and set out for a four days' railway journey up the country. Once the Ghauts are crossed, there is but little to enliven the landscape, through the low scrub jungle of the Central Provinces through, large tracts of grain, varied by a few mosques and tombs, past fortified mud villages, herds of lean cattle, and whitewashed railway stations, where the same bill of fare remains unchanged from year's end to year's end—tough beefsteak and fiery curry!

At last in the dim light of early morning, George arrived at his destination, the insignificant cantonment of Mangobad. His brother officers welcomed him warmly, listened eagerly to all his news, and enquired about his new guns, and mentioned a couple of smart racing ponies that they had, so to speak, marked down for him!

"No doubt they would suit me down to the ground if I could afford them," he answered in reply to a suggestion that he ought to wire and secure them at once. "But I can't afford anything better than a barrack tat. It's a fact," looking frankly round his comrades who were assembled in the billiard-room, after mess. "I am stone broke I have lost a lot of money. I am as poor as Job."

Captain La Touche, a stout dapper-looking man, his special friend, paused as he was about to light a cigarette, and exclaimed:

"Now then, young Holroyd, so you would go to Monaco!"

"Not I! I never went near the place. I lost the money in an investment, in—in short, in—in family—matters."

"Well, I am truly sorry to hear it," said his comrade, coming over and taking a seat beside him, "but you have three nags here, and a good kit, and you can scrape along with very little besides your pay, as long"—and here he eyed him sharply—"as you don't think of getting married."

"I suppose you know that Jones of the other battalion is going to commit matrimony," said George, by way of changing the conversation.

"Going to be married, is he?" growled a grizzled major, "and serves him right. The Lord be praised, that's a folly of which I have never been guilty."

"Nor I," added Captain La Touche, who was a bachelor, and proud of his estate.

"Don't shout till you are out of the wood," returned George impressively.

"Why not?—I am practically out of the wood! There is no fear of me—why I've actually been in action with a would-be father-in-law, and came out scatheless."

"How—you never confessed this before?"

"Oh, it was at Southsea some time ago, when I was quite pretty and slender and active. One night I danced seven or eight times with an uncommonly nice girl: the next morning her father waited on me—a blood-thirsty looking old brigand—and demanded my intentions."

"My intentions, sir," I said, 'were to give your daughter a very pleasant evening' (he enacted the part), I placed my hand on my heart, and bowing most profoundly, said, 'And I flatter myself that I succeeded.' I suppose there is no hope for Jones—no choking him off?"

"No," returned another man, "I know Jones

well; you might as well try to choke a pig with melted butter."

"He won't believe that love is the wine of life, and marriage the headache in the morning," snarled the Major.

"Jones was always a fool," remarked a third.

This anti-matrimonial discussion made George rather uncomfortable; he had been among these ribald scoffers himself, but that was in old days—and before he knew Betty.

Captain La Touche was senior captain in the Royal Musketeers, and George's special chum, and during his absence he had looked after his quarters, and his stud, but now, to his intense disgust, his friend's polo ponies, his tandem cart and harness, and racing saddles, were all advertised in the *Pioneer*! Only one animal was reserved, and Captain La Touche noted with considerable trepidation, that "Barkis," though not a polo pony, had the reputation of being a capital ladies' hack. Cosmo La Touche was a shrewd man, and could put two and two together better than most people; his friend had his pay, and no debts, and a small private income; he could easily manage to keep a couple of ponies and pay his mess bill. Why was he reading so hard with the regimental monshee? Reading in the muggy, rainy weather, grinding for the Higher Standard, late and early, whilst he himself dozed peacefully under the punka with a French novel within reach; and why was George Holroyd, who was always supposed to be wrapped up in the regiment, and nothing but the regiment, and who set his face against detachment duty, the depôt or hill classes, now so desperately eager to get an appointment *anywhere*, so long as it brought him in rupees.

Of course there was a lady in the case, and he boldly taxed him with his guilty secret.

To his anger and astonishment, George admitted that such was positively the fact, admitted it triumphantly.

"And are you engaged?" he demanded sternly.

"No."

"Oh, come then, it's not so bad after all!"

"I only wish it was so bad, as you call it."

"Then why are you not? Won't she have you?" enquired the other, with a jeer in his eyes.

"Because I have only fifty pounds a year and my pay, as long as my mother lives, and, out in this climate, poverty and screwing is the very devil. If I can pass and get some staff appointment we shall manage all right."

"Is she pretty? But I need not ask *you*; of course she is an angel," said Captain La Touche ferociously.

"She is very pretty. She is more than pretty, she is charming."

"And supposing some other fellow steps in, and snaps her up whilst you are stewing over your Hindustani. How will you like *that*?"

George's face was a study in complacency. "I am not afraid," he said quietly.

"You ought to have spoken, and offered yourself at any rate."

"Yes," rather bitterly, "with nothing to settle on her but a sword and a tailor's bill."

"Well, I hope you will come out of it all right. Have you got her photograph?"

"Yes," examining it critically, "well, it's a nice face, but one cannot judge; she may be marked with small pox and have weak eyes, and have a bad figure."

"She has grey eyes, and is as tall and straight as a young fir tree," rejoined George indignantly.

"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall, eh? And what is her name?"

"Elizabeth, but they call her Betty. Elizabeth Redmond."

"Any relation to the Collector here?"

"I don't know, very probably."

"And what are your plans, if I may presume to enquire?"

"To pass if I can, and get something that will add to my pay, and then to write home and ask her to come out and marry me. *She* understands me!"

"I am glad to hear it, for it's more than I do," rejoined his comrade angrily. "You must excuse me for not receiving your news with the enthusiasm it deserves, but you know, George, you always swore that you would not marry before you were a major, if then."

"Very likely, but with all these new warrants I began to think I might *never* be a major; you won't say anything about it

"Trust me," he responded with a gesture of impatience; "besides, you are not engaged, and the worst may not come to the worst: there is many a slip between the cup and the lip. If you were in any other scrape I would lend you money, and for as long as you liked and insist on your taking it, but I'll never lift a finger to help you to a wife."

Days and weeks went by slowly enough, but Betty's photograph now stood boldly on George's writing-table, and spurred him to many a tough task. True, it was chaperoned by portraits of Mrs. Malone and Cuckoo, and by casual eyes she was supposed to be merely another sister, and Captain La Touche kept his secret. Parades and regimental work occupied George's mornings, and many an evening he never went out till dark, but worked hard with his monshee, who proclaimed him to be a "wonderfully clever gentleman," and secretly felt secure of his own premium as together they plodded

through the *Prem Sagar* and *Bagh-o-Bahar*. George was obliged to forego boating, cricket and paperchasing, he took his name off the polo club, and abjured cigarettes, and expensive boots, and only that in his prosperous days he had always been so open-handed, there would have been an outcry at his economy. But his friends believed he had some excellent reason for his self-denial, though no one but Captain La Touche knew how good that reason was. Captain La Touche was a man of five-and-thirty, with a considerable private fortune, and a handsome, pleasant face. His figure was his despair, he would grow stout, aye and keep stout; despite of anti-fat, exercise, and semi-starvation, he still conspicuously filled the eye!

Now he had accepted the situation, ate and drank whatever his rather fastidious palate dictated, kept a weight-carrying charger, and one broad-backed, confidential cob, and fell into the rank of a looker-on, at pig-sticking and polo, and spoke of himself as "a superannuated butterfly!" He was not what is called "a red-hot soldier," and never aspired to command the Royal Musketeers. He looked upon parades and orderly rooms as vexatious interludes, in an otherwise agreeably spent existence, but he was very much attached to the regiment, as an excellent travelling club, and was the firm, personal friend of almost every one of his brother officers; and George Holroyd was Jonathan to this goodly, popular, and somewhat cynical, David.

He was president of the mess, organised entertainments, that were invariably a success, arranged the daily menus, overawed all the waiters, and knew how to put a crusty commanding officer through a course of the most soothing dinner treatment. In fact, he was king of the mess by

universal acclamation, and to hear that he was to lose his right hand, his prime favourite, by marriage, was a blow as painful as it was unexpected. Captain La Touche had some French blood in his veins, and spoke the language like a native. His manners to ladies were unapproachable for chivalrous politeness, and yet, like Miss Dopping, he preferred to associate with the sterner sex ; nevertheless he was a keen observer, and took an almost effeminate interest in their dress. As to his own outward appearance, it was the result of patient study, and the mirror at which many another man fashioned himself. For a first-rate opinion on a coat, a dinner, a point of etiquette or a claret vintage, you could not go to a better person than Captain Cosmo La Touche ; extremes meet ; he and his chosen friend were almost diametrically opposite in mind, body and estate. One was a Sybarite, the other a sportsman ; one was a philosopher, the other a man of action. One could eat anything that was set before him, the other would sooner perish !

I am afraid we cannot conceal from ourselves that Captain La Touche is a *bon vivant*, and is very proud of his delicate palate. Indeed, he has publicly given out, that the woman who aspires to be Mrs. La Touche—be she never so beautiful—must have taken honours at the school of cookery ! He gave a good many of his thoughts to George's affairs, as he lay in a Bombay chair and smoked cigarette after cigarette, meditating sadly on his friend's future.

This girl, this Miss Redmond, had a pretty, well-bred face, and looked as if she had no nonsense about her ; she rode well (if George was to be believed) and played tennis, and was a fair musician, and would possibly be an acquisition to the station ; but what a loss George would be to

the mess! He was a capital rider, could tell a good story, and sing a good song, and was quite the most brilliant polo player in the province.

Now all that would be at an end! He would only care for driving his wife about in a little pony-cart, and subsequently dining *tête-à-tête* on a leg of mutton, and custard pudding—ugh! George would sink into domestic limbo “*avec la fatalité d’une pierre qui tomba.*”

Mangobad was a typical up-country station, sequestered and self-contained. Besides the Royal Musketeers, there was a native infantry regiment, a chaplain, a judge, a collector, several doctors, several engineers, a few indigo planters in from the district, and now and then a great man encamped in the mango tope, with his imposing transport of camels, elephants, and carriage horses.

The cantonment was just a comfortable size for a sociable community—and luckily the community *was* sociable; it numbered about fifty men and fifteen ladies, but the latter fluctuated. Sometimes they numbered as many as thirty, sometimes but three.

The station was situated in the midst of a great flat grain country, diversified by fine groves or topes of forest trees, and scattered over with red-roofed villages of immemorial antiquity. Riding along the well-kept pukka roads, with ripe, yellow corn waving at either side, the cool November air and the noble timber would deceive one into believing that they were in the south of Europe, until a Commissariat elephant lumbering along, or a camel carriage and pair, or a four-in-hand of hideous water buffaloes, dragging a primitive wain laden with sugar-cane, dispelled the idea. Besides the level roads bordered with Neem, Shesum, Sirus, and Teak trees, there were smooth, green parade grounds, and comfortable bungalows, standing in

the midst of luxuriant gardens, where roses, passion-flowers, oranges and strawberries, mangoes and mignonette grew in sociable abundance.

There was a picturesque church, and an excellent station club, where all the community assembled to read the papers, play tennis, drink tea, and hear the news. By the middle of April, the tennis courts were deserted, the chairs round the tea-table were vacant; and the gallop of ponies was no longer heard cutting up the adjacent polo ground. All those who could command money and leave, had promptly fled away to various hill stations.

George Holroyd was not among the exodus, he remained to do duty—the little that is possible with the thermometer at 104—and to sit behind a “*Khus-khus*” tattie, while the hot west wind came booming through the mango trees—and fought with the weary, stifling hours, and the weary pages of the *Bagh-o-Bahar*. Captain La Touche had gone to Simla, where he was a conspicuous member of the clubs, and an esteemed customer at Peliti’s, and gave *recherché* little dinners at the chalet; he had done his utmost to carry his friend with him, and had used arguments, bribes, and even threats.

“You will go mad, my dear fellow, you will certainly go mad, staying down here, and grinding your brains away; you will feel the effects before another week goes over your head. Come up for a couple of months at least; come and stay with *me*; come, my dear boy, and see Simla. Come! I’ll mount you at polo, come!”

“Not I—thank you; if I went anywhere I would go into Cashmere. I have no taste for sticking myself over with patent leather, and peacock’s feathers, and riding beside a woman’s rickshaw.”

“It would depend upon *who* was in the rickshaw, I suppose. Eh? Well, if you don’t mind yourself, it’s my opinion that one of these days we shall be

riding after your coffin! Promise me before I go, that if you feel at all seedy you will send me a wire, and follow it at once."

As he was very pertinacious, George gave him the required promise, solely for the sake of peace.

Early in June he went up for his examination, and, whilst he awaited the result in miserable suspense, he received a letter from his uncle Godfrey, who, through the family lawyer, had recently discovered the state of his money affairs. After upbraiding him angrily for keeping the matter from him, and for allowing himself to be stripped to his last shilling in order to support Major Malone's family, he went on to say, that he would make him an allowance of five hundred a year, in order that he might live like a gentleman, and as became his heir, and if he would only come home, and settle down, and marry some nice girl, he would do a great deal more for him.

"And if I settle down, and marry a nice girl out here; I wonder what he will say to that?" said his nephew to himself, as he tried to realise his unexpected good fortune. He did not spend much time in reflection, but galloped over to the Colonel's bungalow, and asked that amazed officer if there was any chance of his getting three months' leave to England, and to start at once."

"Not the smallest," returned the Colonel firmly, adding a complaint that he made at least ten times a day—"I have only four subalterns. You know I am terribly short of officers—Indeed, Holroyd, I wonder that a man of your sense could be such a fool as to propose such a thing!"

The same mail that brought Mr. Godfrey Holroyd's letter brought the news that Colonel and Mrs. Calvert were coming out in September. Colonel Calvert was the District Inspector of Police for Mangobad. What a chance for Betty! She

might travel with *them*. He lost no time in writing, and despatching three letters by the outgoing mail, one to the Calverts, and two to Noone, and anxiously awaited Betty's telegram.

In due time the answer arrived, and by a strange coincidence, the same day's post brought the agreeable intimation that he had passed the Higher Standard in Hindustani. Surely a lucky omen, if omens stand for aught. He gave a dinner at the mess to celebrate the event with his brother officers.

(Also *another* event of which they were as yet in ignorance.)

Fortune, who had turned her back on him for so long, was now apparently all smiles, and seemed to be thrusting her favours on him with both hands.

CHAPTER XXIII.

" MISERRIME."

ON the strength of his increase of income, Mr. Holroyd bought two ponies and a cart (and this cart it was noted, had a ladies' step). He had long admired a certain empty bungalow with a large garden and rose-screened verandah. More than once he had inspected the interior, and at last he boldly gave orders to the landlord to have the garden put in order, the hedges clipped, and the rooms matted. When it became noised abroad that George Holroyd had been seen looking over a large double house, that he had ordered a dinner-service, and a piano, the truth could be no longer concealed, he was going to be married! This was a fine piece of news for Mangobad. The men congratulated him somewhat sadly but the ladies made up for them in fervour, and were all on the *qui vive* to know what the bride would be like. Captain

La Touche, being searchingly cross-questioned, was able to gratify them with a few particulars respecting her. She was young—only nineteen—Irish, and pretty, and, as far as he could make out, she would be an agreeable addition to their circle. Mr. Holroyd was not the least bashful in accepting their good wishes, and seemed anxious to bespeak their friendship for his future wife. She was so young and inexperienced, he declared—quite a child in many ways, and only hitherto accustomed to a very quiet country life. He was exceedingly grateful for any suggestions offered by notable housekeepers and a great deal of advice was placed ungrudgingly at his service. The Judge's wife engaged a cook, khansamah, and ayah; the Chaplain's sister superintended the purchase of lamps and kitchen utensils, the Colonel's two daughters chose furniture for the drawing-room, and went over the rooms and discussed arrangements and ornamentation with zeal.

All at once the community were electrified to hear that Mr. Holroyd had suddenly changed his mind about what was called the "garden" bungalow, and was going into the two-storeyed one, which had so long stood empty—the bungalow in which the last tenant, Major Bagshawe, had cut his throat. What was the reason of such an extraordinary freak? Why exchange a modern, well-built house, with a cheerful aspect, for a gloomy tumble-down mansion—certainly more imposing, and standing in quite a park-like enclosure, but which had been abandoned to rats and ghosts for years. No one knew the motive for this strange proceeding—not even Captain La Touche.

A few days before "this mysterious caprice of George Holroyd's," the long desired mail had been received—the mail which was to bring him Betty's

answer in her own hand-writing, instead of that of the telegraph Baboo. The night before it was delivered in Mangobad, he could scarcely close his eyes. He was astir by daybreak, and watching for the post peon long before that worthy began his rounds. Here he came in sight at last, and with a good plump packet of letters in his hand. George almost tore them from him, and then hurried into his room to read them in solitude, where no bearer with tea, or sweeper with broom, dared disturb him. There was one from his mother, one from his lawyer, one from Mrs. Redmond, one from Belle, but where was Betty's? He turned them over very carefully, and then ran out after the dakwalla. "Hullo! Stop! Hold on!" he shouted (in Hindustani of course) "you have another letter for me."

The man halted and showed his wallet; there was nothing else addressed to Mr. Holroyd, no, not even a trade circular. "There must be some mistake," he muttered to himself, as he slowly retraced his steps. Could she have missed the mail? He must only content himself with Mrs. Redmond's epistle for the present, and, happy thought, that thrifty old lady's effusion might contain Betty's letter after all! Alas, no, there was only one sheet of paper within the envelope, and this is what it said:

"Dear Mr. Holroyd—Your letter and enclosure reached me by the last mail, and I am rather concerned as to how to reply to it, for I have taken a step that will surprise you and which you may never forgive—I have given your offer of marriage to my daughter Belle."

A rush of blood came suddenly to George Holroyd's ears, the paper seemed to swim before him; he threw it down on the table, and placing both hands to his head, exclaimed aloud;

"I must be going mad! Either that, or she is writing from a lunatic asylum!"

After a moment's pause, he once more snatched up the letter, and read on:

"There was nothing in your note that did not equally apply to her, and Belle is so fond of you, and you paid her such marked attention, that if you were to marry Betty she would lose her reason—or break her heart.

"India has always been her dream, and, with you and India combined, her happiness is assured, and I may tell you frankly, that this is all that I now care for. You will think me a very wicked, unprincipled old woman, but I have your interests at heart, as well as Belle's, and though I shall not live to know it, you will approve of my conduct yet. I am dying by inches. I may not see another summer, and I obey the most natural of all instincts in providing (when I can) for my own child. Even if you execrate me, I can endure your hatred, for I shall be supported by the conviction, that I have done well.

"Belle, beautiful, animated, and accustomed to the best military society, is the beau ideal of an officer's wife, and will be in a congenial sphere—your credit and your comfort. Betty—a simple, little, awkward girl, with no ideas beyond horses and dogs and flowers—is cut out for the position she is about to fill; as the wife of a wealthy country gentleman, she can make herself happy in her own land, she is in her element among poor people, or in the hunting-field, and would be quite miserable in India. She is going to marry Augustus Moore; they are devotedly attached to one another, and he has known her from her childhood."

"*Mentitor fortiter*," was Mrs. Redmond's motto, and to do her justice, she lived up to it; in a crisis like the present *what* was a lie more or less? This

notable falsehood gave a neat and suitable finish to the whole scheme. Moreover, like all lies of the most dangerous class, it contained a grain of the truth—Augustus Moore had known Betty from childhood, and a less keen-sighted woman than the mistress of Noone, could see that he was her slave; the match was merely a question of time.

"In withholding your offer from Betty," the letter went on to say, "I am sparing you the mortification of a refusal. I have put the round people in the round holes in spite of you, you see, and by the time you are reading this, Belle (who knows nothing, poor darling) will be half way to India with the Calverts. Betty has been helping her most zealously in her preparations, and keeping up all our spirits with her merry ways, and gay little jokes and songs.

"I do not know what we should have done without her; she has not the faintest suspicion that you care for her, for all her thoughts are fixed in *another* direction. Be good to Belle—she is quite a child, a spoiled child in many ways; she is not much of a manager or housekeeper, for I have wished her to make the most of her youth, and only asked her to be happy and to look pretty. She is devoted to you, and has been so from the very first, though with true maidenly dignity she has concealed her feelings — even from *me*, but I know that the prospect of being your wife, has filled her with unspeakable happiness. Perhaps, after all, you may repudiate her love, you may refuse to receive her, and leave her a friendless, nervous, sensitive girl, unwelcomed in a strange land—only to return home broken-hearted, dis-illusioned, and disgraced; but I scarcely believe you will be capable of this, knowing that she loves you, confides in you, and has no friends in India. Do not answer this letter. I may as well tell you, candidly, that if you do I

shall not read it, but will put it into the fire, for in my failing health, my medical man advises me strictly against any kind of unnecessary agitation. Pray, believe me yours most faithfully,

"EMMA REDMOND."

By the time George Holroyd had come to the end of this precious epistle, it would be impossible to describe his feelings; they were a mixture of incredulity, horror, agonising disappointment, and uncontrollable fury.

"Mrs. Redmond was mad!" This he swore with a great oath; "or he was mad, and everyone was mad."

He seized his mother's letter, much as a drowning man clutches at a straw; it proved to be a somewhat querulous effusion, wondering that he had never given *her* a hint of his intentions, amazed to hear of his engagement to Belle, and pathetically imploring him to "think it over," but wishing him every happiness—whatever his fate. Delighted at the news of his uncle's generosity, and hinting (nay more than hinting) that he might share some of his good fortune with Denis—openly stating that his poor dear brother wrote the most pitiful accounts of his circumstances, and that she was sure he would be annoyed to hear, that he had actually applied to Mrs. Maccabe for pecuniary assistance, instead of to his *own* flesh and blood, and that a line to Denis Malone, care of the barman at the Kangaroo Arms, Albany, South Australia, would always find him.

George put this epistle aside, and tore open Belle's envelope with a shaking hand.

When his eyes fell on the page beginning "My own darling," he crumbled the letter up into a ball, and dashed it from him, with anything but a lover-like gesture.

Then he rose and began to walk about the room

like a man possessed. He might have guessed how it would be! Betty was not bound to him in any way, and whilst he had been toiling for her in silence, at the other side of the world—Ghosty Moore was within a ride!

Ghosty Moore was rich, young, and popular. He could give her everything her heart desired. She would marry him, and be beloved, admired and happy. A country lady with half a dozen hunters, and as many dogs as she pleased. As for him, his life was spoiled, it did not matter what became of him; he threw himself into a chair, leant his arms on the table, buried his head in them, and wished himself dead.

That Betty was lost to him was beyond doubt, and that Belle was on her way out to marry him, was also beyond doubt; but no, he said to himself fiercely, he would never make her his wife, and thus fulfil the schemes, and be the easy tool, of her iniquitous old mother; never!

To have the dearest hopes of his life dispersed by one shattering blow, was surely sufficiently hard for a man to bear, but to have another fate imperatively thrust on him within the same hour—a fate from which his highest and best feelings instinctively recoiled—a fate that his heart most passionately repudiated—this was to drink the cup of bitterness to the dregs, twice!

And if he refused to accept Belle as his bride, what was his alternative? he asked himself, with fierce perplexity.

He felt dazed and stunned; the more he endeavoured to muster his thoughts, to pursue ideas, to reach some definite plan, the more unmanageable those thoughts and ideas became.

It was desperately hard to realise that one short ten minutes had changed the whole current of his life.

* * * * *

Even to one's old familiar friend, I doubt if it is wise to give the entrée to your private room at all hours. He may chance to find a soul in earthly torment, a mind *en deshabille*, with the mask of conventionality, and the cloak of reserve, torn off, and thrown to the winds.

Captain La Touche was whistling cheerily as he crossed the verandah, and entered his comrade's apartment. He looked cool, handsome, and debonnair in his creaseless white suit and spotless linen (he was such a dandy that he actually sent his shirts twice a month to England to be washed; and oh! feat beyond the dhoby! *giazed*). He had evidently had a good mail, for his face was radiant, and he carried a packet of letters, and a French comic paper in his hand. All at once his whistling ceased, as his eyes fell on his comrade's prone head—and the torn and discarded letters scattered broadcast about the floor.

"Hullo, George, my dear old chap!" he exclaimed, "you have not any bad news I hope. No one dead, eh?"

George raised a rigid white face to his, and gazed at him blankly and shook his head.

"Your money gone again, eh?"

"No!"

"Oh, come then it can't be so very bad, pull yourself together, my son, and have a whisky and soda; you look as if you had been knocked into the middle of next week. What is it all about?"

"I've—I've a splitting headache."

"Oh, and is *that* all?" rather dubiously.

"And some rather worrying letters," he continued, making a great effort to carry out the second part of his visitor's prescription. "I shall be all right bye and bye, don't mind me."

At first a wild idea had flashed through his brain.

He would consult his friend, and put the whole story before him, like a hard case in *Vanity Fair*, and say, "supposing a man proposes for one girl, and another comes out instead, believing that *she* is the right one—what would you do? Marry her?" But as he gazed at Captain La Touche, that sleek, prosperous, cynical bachelor, Lord President of the Mess (sometimes a heritage of woe) and bitter enemy of matrimony, his heart failed him. "Joe," as he was called, would explode into one of his loud bursts of laughter, and declare that it was the best joke he had ever heard in the whole course of his life! Instead of being sober-minded and sympathetic, he would chaffingly examine the capabilities of the subjects for burlesque treatment; he would be jocose and unbearable. But in this belief George did his friend injustice!

In one vivid mental flash, he saw the ordeal he would now have to face at mess, an ordeal he dared not confront. The good-humoured jokes, congratulations, and presents of his brother officers, were acceptable enough yesterday, but *to-day* they would be torture, as it were, searing a gaping wound with red-hot iron. How was he to assume a part—he being no actor at the best of times—the part of the happy and expectant bridegroom! His thoughts flew to a certain lonely dâk bungalow, about twenty miles out, rarely frequented, and sufficiently far from the haunts of men. He would go in at once, for ten days' leave for snipe shooting, put a few things together, and gallop out there as soon as orderly-room was over. He must be alone, like some wounded animal, that plunges into the thicket, when it has received a mortal hurt—that it may die apart from its fellows, and endure its agony unseen.

Once there, he would have time to advise with himself, to review the whole burning question, and

to meditate on falsified hopes, abandoned aims, and a lost love.

The maturing of this sudden project did not occupy sixty seconds, and Captain La Touche was still standing interrogatively in the doorway.

"I'm not feeling very fit, Joe, the cramming is beginning to tell as you predicted. I think I shall go out for ten days' snipe shooting, to blow the cobwebs out of my brains."

"It's too early for snipe," objected his visitor, "make it the end of next week, and I'll go with you, old man!"

"I saw several wisps coming in last evening, and——"

"And of course I *forgot*," interrupted the other jocosely, "your time is short, poor fellow, and who knows if it may not be your *last* shoot. Such things have happened! Where are you going?"

"I was thinking of Sungoo," he returned rather nervously.

"Sungoo! A nasty feverish hole! I would not go there if I were you."

"There are several first class jheels about, and I'd like to make a good bag," returned the other, now lying as freely as Mrs. Redmond herself.

"Well, well, have your own way, you always do," returned his chum with a French shrug of his broad shoulders. "'Pon my word, you gave me a jolly good fright, just now, I thought there was bad news, something up at home. By-bye," and he opened his big white umbrella, and strode off to breakfast.

Sungoo dāk bungalow was retired enough for St. Anthony himself; it stood aloof from the high road, behind a clump of bamboos, and a hedge of somewhat dusty cactus.

George Holroyd's active bearer made daily raids on the nearest village for fowl and eggs and goat's

milk, whilst his master paced the verandah, or tramped over the country, and fought with his thoughts, and endeavoured to shape out his future life. Willingly would he change his lot for that of one of the cheerful brown tillers of the soil, by whom he was surrounded, and whom he came across in his long and aimless wanderings. How absorbed and interested was that young fellow, as he sat at the edge of a tank, dividing his time between his bamboo rod, and bobbing line, and the inevitable *huka*, that stood beside him.

He did not seem to have a care in the world!—and it was never likely to be *his* fate to marry a woman against his will! All the same, did his envious observer but know the truth, it was more than probable that the same young man had been married from his cradle. Sungoo dāk bungalow was not only famed for seclusion and sport—it was notoriously unhealthy; the rank vegetation and the vapours from the neighbouring reedy snipeheels made it an undesirable residence. Hideous spiders with wormy legs, and semi-tame toads abounded in the three small rooms. Mushrooms grew out of the walls, a family of noisy civet cats lodged in the roof, hundreds of frogs held oratorios in a neighbouring pond, rendering sleep impossible—and altogether it was as damp and dreary a dwelling as anyone could wish to see; and a man who had taken a dislike to existence, could not have chosen a more congenial abode.

One day George's bearer went considerably further than the nearest mud-walled village; he galloped post haste into Mangobad, and informed Captain La Touche and his brother officers that his master was very ill, in a raging fever, and "talking very strangely."

"That's it," vociferated his chum, "I was afraid there was something up. You notice he never

sent in a *single* brace of snipe, and he knows what a boon they are."

He and the station doctor set off at once, and brought the patient in the next morning in a dhooly. He was still in a high fever, but perfectly conscious and alive to his surroundings.

For days he had been racked with an uncontrollable longing to see Betty only once, and to speak to her face to face—as vain a longing as that of the wretched captive in a deep, dark dungeon, who languishes to see the sun!

As Captain La Touche sat by him, and gazed at him anxiously, he opened his eyes, and said in a low voice: "Joe, I would give half my life to see her but for five minutes—and to speak to her face to face."

Captain La Touche was exceedingly concerned, and subsequently told his brother officers that it looked like a bad business, for Holroyd was still delirious, and wandering in his mind.

Ten days' excellent nursing brought him round, and the doctor was most assiduous in what he called "patching him up" in order that he might be in time to meet the steamer. Nevertheless all George's friends were shocked at the change that such a short illness had made in his appearance. He looked as if he had aged ten years in ten days; his eyes were sunken, his cheeks hollow, and he was so weak and emaciated that "he appeared to be walking about to save the expenses of his funeral," and in this cheerful condition he went down to Bombay, to accept the inevitable, and to receive his bride.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE HONEYMOON."

"Face joys a costly mask to wear,
"Tis bought with pangs long nourished
And rounded to despair."

"ON the 5th instant at the Cathedral, Bombay, by the Rev. Erasmus Jones, George Holroyd, Lieutenant, Her Majesty's Royal Musketeers, only son of the late George Holroyd, and grandson of Sir Mowbray Holroyd, of Rivals Place, county Durham, to Isabelle Felicité, daughter of the late Fergus Redmond, grand-niece of Lord Bogberry, and great-grand-niece of the Marquis of Round Tower. By Telegram."

Mrs. Redmond herself had composed this high sounding announcement, and had handed it to Colonel Calvert, with instructions to insert the date, and not to trust it to Holroyd, but to see to it himself—perhaps in her secret heart she feared that George might modify her magnificent composition.

The wedding was strictly private, and if the bridegroom looked haggard and pre-occupied, the bride was both blooming and beaming. The Calverts and Miss Gay were the only guests, and after the ceremony, the happy pair went direct to the railway station, and departed on a tour up-country. They visited Jeypore, Ajmir, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow. Belle enjoyed the bustle, the constant change, the novelty of her surroundings, the admiring eyes of other passengers and the luxury of having every wish most carefully

studied. But she did not much appreciate Indian sights, and Indian scenery. She gave them a very cursory notice, her attention being chiefly centred on her fellow travellers. It was the flood-tide of the globe - trotting season — English, Americans, French, and Australians, were scattered over the land in hundreds, "doing India," from a certain point of view, and believing that when they had seen the Taj at Agra, the burning ghaut at Benares, the snows at Darjeeling, a snake charmer, and a fakeer, they were henceforth qualified authorities on the Eastern question! The hotels were crammed, the proprietors reaping a golden harvest, and often at their wits' end to find quarters for their guests. Belle enjoyed the numerous and varied society she met at the table d'hôte, her roving, challenging dark eyes daily wandered among what were, to her, entirely new types. There was the purse-proud, tubby little man, who scorned the letter H and expected to be served as promptly and as obsequiously as if he were in his own house; who roared and stormed in English at amazed Mahomedan khitmatgars, who did not understand either him or his wants. There were the people who entered into conversation right and left, and cheerfully discussed plans and places, the people who never opened their mouths but to receive their forks or knives; the people who eat everything, the people who barely tasted a morsel—and the delicate couple from Calcutta who had brought their own cook! The American party, mostly wearing pince-nezs, bright, brisk, agreeable, seeing the world at rail-road speed and pleased with all they saw, sleeping in trains, eating in "ticca" gharries, *en route* to some sight, and writing up their diaries at every spare moment. The English family — comprised of a father collecting facts, a mother collecting pottery, two

pretty daughters, a valet and a maid—to whom time and money were no object, and who were a perfect fortune to the hawkers who haunted the hotel verandahs. There was the gentleman from New Zealand, who was surprised at nothing but the gigantic size of the cockroaches, and the ruddy-cheeked youth from Belfast, who was surprised at everything, and who half expected to see tigers sporting on the Apollo Bunder or chasing the Bombay trams; also the two cautious ladies, who brought their hand-bags to the table, and read guide books between the courses. Moreover, there was the handsome rich young man who had come out to shoot big game, and discoursed eloquently of the delights of the Terai, and the merits of explosive bullets, and shikar elephants, and was not unlikely to be "brought down" himself by the bright eyes of an Australian girl, who played off Japan against the jungles. Last, but not least, the seasoned Anglo-Indian, passing through to his district or his regiment up country, who spoke the language glibly, helped his fellow creatures to make their wants known, and seemed absolutely at home with his trusty bearer, his bedding, and his tiffin basket—and being well known to the hotel baboo, and so to speak on his adopted heath, secured, without a second's demur, the best room and the best attention. Many of these travellers were encountered by the Holroyds over and over again, and Belle, in her lively way, had devised nicknames for most of them; nor did they themselves pass unnoticed. No one suspected them of being newly married, for Belle, though smartly dressed and remarkably handsome, was no young girl; nor were she and her husband selfishly absorbed in one another, to the exclusion of ordinary mortals. They were known among their companies as "the lady with the poodle," and "the

man with the headache"; for George looked as if he were a continual martyr to that distressing affliction. He was unmistakably an officer—the lively girl who had been in Japan declared she guessed it by his boots—and the couple were supposed to be residents taking a little cold weather tour, *à la* Darby and Joan. This mistake was intolerable to Belle, and she pursued one harmless lady with undying animosity, because as they were shuffling out to Amba, on the same elephant, she had innocently remarked:

"I suppose this sort of a ride is no novelty to you—you are quite accustomed to India."

Belle, whose temper was precarious, and who was now in a deadly fright, and consequently inclined to be cross, said snappishly:

"Pray *how* long do you suppose I have been married?"

"Well, say ten years——"

"Say ten days," rejoined the bride, with laconic severity.

"Oh my! I *am* vexed. Well, I hope you'll excuse me;" but Belle did not do anything so generous, and cut her dead when they subsequently met at Laurie's Hotel, Agra. The moon was full and, as a natural consequence, so was the hotel; for what sight so renowned as the Taj by moonlight? Belle went over the fort, grumbling and reluctant, in the wake of a conscientious guide; the day was warm and there was far too much to see! The Motee Musjid, the Jasmin Tower, the dining halls, durbar halls, tilting yards, court yards, and baths—the combined works of Akbar and Shahjehan. Her taste was more for the horrible than the beautiful, and when she was taken from marble halls above, to dark dungeons and underground passages below, and when she had crawled, torch in hand, through a hole in the wall, and seen

with her own eyes the secret chamber where women of the palace were strangled and thrown into the Jumna, she expressed herself as deeply interested and gratified. The tomb across the river was duly visited, and then the Taj. Yes. She admired it! but it aroused her enthusiasm in a much fainter degree than the contents of a shop of gold and silver embroidery, although the sight that bursts on one as they enter the great gateway, and catch the first glimpse of the approach, surmounted by the famous dome and minarets, is surely unsurpassed. The Taj, to translate its name, is "the crown" of every building in the world, and it is to be regretted that Shahjehan did not live to carry out his intention of building a similar tomb for himself in black marble at the other side of the river, connecting the two by a marble bridge.

Belle agreed to a second visit by moonlight, because, as she assured herself, "it was a thing to say she had seen," but the admiration the Tomb evoked, the intent look on men's faces, the tears in the women's eyes, merely filled her with amazement and derision. She praised the delicate Italian inlaid work, and the lace-like marble screens, and tried her not particularly sweet voice, under the echoing dome, with a shrill roulade that considerably startled her unprepared audience. At eleven o'clock at night she again found herself in the Taj gardens; "much too early," she grumbled, as she seated herself on a bench half-way between the Taj and the entrance. "The other people won't be here for an hour." It was evidently "other people" she had come to see. George made no remark; he stood behind her with his arms folded. He had always secretly worshipped the beautiful in nature—an Indian sunset in the rains, a chain of lofty snow-clad peaks at sunrise, were far more to his taste than the

finest paintings, and the building before him, with its pearl-white dome rising into the dark blue starry sky, the stately grace of this crown of love, the beauty of this perfect monument to a woman's memory, crept into his senses and sank into his soul. The moon was so bright, the air so clear, that he could distinguish the fretwork, and the heavy-headed lilies around the basement of the tomb, and this garden, in which "the light of the Harem" had lain for eighteen years—whilst thousands of workmen laboured and died for her fame—was truly a fitting setting for so pure a gem of art, with its tall trees and paved walks, its fountains and fish ponds, its masses of yellow roses and groves of fragrant orange blossoms, now filling the air with their perfume. What a paradise for lovers, thought George, an ideal spot for whispered vows this exquisite Eastern night! But what had he to do with love? He was a married man, and in his heart, there was not one spark of love for the smart little lady, with the dog on her knee, who was his own, his wife, his other self for evermore, who had a right to be beside him, and to share his lot, as long as they both should live. Esteem he might give her, respect and a certain kind of admiration, and possibly affection; but love—Never! Meanwhile it was his most urgent duty to disguise the truth, and sharp as Belle was, she never once guessed it. Who could be more attentive than George? Her merest hint was caught at, the best carriages and best rooms, were secured for her everywhere in advance by telegram; he protected her from rain or heat, from draught or dust, as if she were made of wax. And he had given her most lovely presents. Such a diamond ring and such a pair of earrings! If poor Maria Finny could only see them she would die—die of envy, hatred and malice. His affection was not demon-

strative but practical—and, as such, was appreciated and preferred.

As George's sombre eyes fell upon his companion, he noticed that she was now gazing at the Taj in an entirely different attitude, with an air of rapt, absorbed meditation. Ah, it had grown on her at last, as it did on every one ; she had even dislodged "Mossoo," who was hunting frogs, with all the zeal of his nation.

"Well, Belle, a penny for your thoughts?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh," rousing herself to look at him. "Well, I was wondering, if I could get any curling pins here? and do you know, that I have been thinking seriously about that blue and silver dress front; perhaps I ought to take the pink one after all—you remember the one at the corner shop; there was more stuff for the body. What do you say dear?"

Here was a companion with whom to gaze on earth's loveliness! No, no, Belle had, as she boasted, no sentiment about her; she did not care for past greatness—the marble glories of Shahjehan, nor the red granite courts of Akbar. She much preferred the present age, a brisk drive back to the hotel, and a nice little hot supper; yes, she would rather have mulled claret and cutlets, than moonlight and marble.

"Have *both* if you like," returned George after a momentary silence, "and had we not better be making a start?"

"Both!" rising to her feet. "Oh, you dear, good, generous George," taking his arm as she spoke. "If you are quite sure that I am not too extravagant, for there is something else I want."

"What is that?"

"A present for Betty; you know how good she has been to me: she really worked like a slave to

get me ready, and I would like to send her something pretty; it need not cost much, but she has no nice things, no generous George to give her presents," glancing up coquettishly into his face. How white he looked—or was it the moon? "You know what a dull life she leads—any little pleasure, any little surprise——"

"She won't be dull when she is Mrs. Moore," he interrupted sharply.

"I shall tell you a great secret, that no one knows but me; she will never marry Ghosty, never. She was quite angry with me, when I teased her. She declares she will never marry any one, and if she keeps her word, as I hope she will—for who is there to marry at Ballingooole?—it will make my mind *so* easy about poor mamma!"

As Belle made this sweet, unselfish remark, they had reached the entrance, and whilst she was coaxing "Mossoo" into the carriage, George turned away, ostensibly to take one last look at the Taj as it appeared framed by the great gateway, but it was not of the Taj that he was thinking. Although his eyes were resting on a vision of a dazzling white dome and minarets, he was a prey to tormenting speculation; he was asking himself a startling question. Could Mrs. Redmond have lied to him? Or was Betty's speech merely a girl's hypocritical repudiation of a lover. Who was the most likely to speak the truth, Mrs. Redmond, or Betty?

As Belle and her husband, drove rapidly back towards the cantonments, with "Mossoo" extended on the front seat of the landau; they were unusually silent; not one word was spoken about their recent expedition—they seemed buried in their own thoughts.

She was busily engaged in mentally making up the pink and silver satin, and *he* was thinking, that

if what Belle had just told him was true—as true as she appeared to believe—he never would have married her !

Two days later, Mrs. Holroyd was sitting in the hotel verandah, surrounded by jewellers, their wares displayed temptingly in the invariable manner, on Turkey red.

"Well ! what about that present ? " enquired her husband, as he discovered her. "Get something good. Will two hundred rupees do ? "

"Two hundred ! I was thinking of fifty. What a lavish, extravagant fellow you are ; you will ruin yourself if I don't look after you."

But she accepted the sum, in spite of her pretty protestations.—George was beginning to know what these protestations were worth !—Belle carefully selected a delicate gold bangle, and exhibited it on her own wrist, with much complacency.

"You are not going to give her *that*, are you ? " he enquired with secret dismay.

"Yes, I thought of it at first ; it would almost match one you sent her, but really it is too much to give her, and on second thoughts," with a playful air, "don't you think it looks very well on *me* ? "

"Yes, yes, of course it does ; leave it where it is," he said with eager acquiescence, "you must keep it yourself."

Anything was better than sending Betty a second bangle, and Belle, the munificent, the grateful, the honourable, chose for her cousin—when her husband was not present—a simple brooch, value thirty rupees, though she told him it cost eighty—and pocketed the balance.

From Agra, the Holroyds went to Cawnpore—melancholy Cawnpore !—with its dusty, glaring roads, grim barracks and tragic history. The

garrulous guide who drove them round, lolled at his ease half into the carriage, preferring the rôle of *raconteur* to coachman, leaving the horses chiefly to themselves; but no doubt, they knew the too familiar weary rounds, from Nana Sahib's ruinous house, to the entrenchments—the Memorial Church—the massacre ghaut—and the well. The full details of the tragedy had a horrible fascination for Belle, and, despite her husband's continual interruptions and denials, she would hear all; and the guide, for once, had a listener entirely after his own heart; but the Indian mid-day sun, and Indian atrocities were too much for this excitable traveller with a lurid imagination. A climax arrived, when she stood gazing at the angel over the well, that exquisite embodiment of sorrow and peace—which the guide glibly assured her was "the work of 'Mackitty,' the same man who had built the Taj, at Agra." As she gazed with twitching lips, and working eye-brows, she said, "You call it a lovely face, George! Not at all. To me, it is not a face of sorrow, but a face of cold, undying vengeance! Yes, vengeance," she added, raising her voice to a scream and glaring at the guide with a wild flicker in her eyes, "why don't you keep a supply of natives here for us who come on pilgrimage? I know what I would do to them, with my own hands."

She looked so odd and excited, that the old soldier was completely cowed, and ceased to relate how "he and Havelock" had marched to the relief of Cawnpore. This handsome lady had a strange face, she was muttering to herself, and gnawing her handkerchief, as she lay back on the carriage cushions, and she had passionately tossed his humble offering—a bit of yew from the site of the house of massacre—far away into the powdery white road. He had not even the presence of mind, to ask for a whiskey peg, when George paid

him off at the station, but he whispered confidentially as he pocketed his rupees :

"I've seen 'em in hysterics, and I seen 'em crying, but I never saw one take on like *her* before," indicating Belle with his bony thumb. "She *would* draw me on, you see—and all them times is real to me—I was in 'em, and my words has worked on her feelings, them and the sun, has done it ; keep her cool and quiet, and she may come all right in time for the mail train."

But was it the sun? A terrible thought, a sickening dread, occurred to George ; was there not a gleam of insanity in those fiery red eyes that encountered his, in the dim light of the waiting-room? He and her Ayah applied ice and eau-de-cologne to her head, and kept her in a still, dark room in complete quiet, and this regimen wrought a speedy cure. By the following morning, Belle declared herself ready to go on at once, to go anywhere, and they proceeded to Lucknow. The grey shell-shattered walls of the Residency, the scene of her countrymen and women's heroic resistance, had no more interest for Mrs. Holroyd than the Taj. The Silver Bazaar and the cavalry band at the "Chutter Munzil," were far more to her taste, not to speak of a screaming farce at the Mahomed Bagh Theatre. At length they turned their faces towards Mangobad, and as the train steamed out of Lucknow Station, George, as he carefully arranged Belle's pillows and rugs, and books and fans, breathed a deep sigh of thankfulness and relief—*At any rate the honeymoon was over.*

CHAPTER XXV.

A NEW LIFE.

THE Holroyds arrived at Mangobad, with unexpected punctuality, and Belle was in raptures with her new home—her *own* house—a spacious, well-situated bungalow, replete with every comfort. There was a German piano, a pony and cart, a cheval glass, a sewing machine, new jail carpets and matting, pretty curtains and furniture, and ornaments, a verandah filled with plants, and birds; and a tribe of respectable black-whiskered servants, with unimpeachable “chits” awaiting her good pleasure.

Truly nothing had been forgotten; this bungalow had undoubtedly been fitted up by a lover.

Belle danced about, and clapped her hands, gesticulated, and ran from room to room like a child of six. Little did she guess that all these delightful, thoughtful preparations—had been made for another person.

For several days after her arrival, she was excessively busy, unpacking and shaking out her dresses and beautifying the drawing-room, with rapid and tasteful fingers. A palm in this corner, a screen in that, a graceful drapery here, a bow of ribbon there, photographs, fans and cushions abounded—in a short time the room was transformed as if by magic, but its mistress's zeal was evanescent. Once a thing was done there was an end of it; the palms might wither, the draperies gather dust, for all she noted. She detested sustained effort. However, everything was in its

pristine freshness, when her visitors began to make their appearance.

Captain La Touche was naturally the first to call upon his friend's bride. He drove up in his dog-cart, dressed in his most recent Europe suit, and brimming over with curiosity and *bonhommie*.

Mem Sahib gave "salaam" and he was shewn into the drawing-room, and there waited for a considerable time, whilst he heard sounds of some one skirmishing with drawers and wardrobe doors, in the next apartment.

He was full of pleasant anticipations of a girl of nineteen, tall and slim, with beautiful, Irish grey eyes, even in her cheap, blurred photograph she had a sweet face!

But who was *this*? that pulled back the purdah and came tripping into the room. A pretty little brunette, with a Frenchified dress and an artificial smile. He rose and bowed, waiting expectantly for another figure—that was surely yet to come.

"I know you so very well by name," said Belle offering a pair of tiny (somewhat bony) hands. "My husband is always talking of Captain La Touche."

Then this was the bride; he was in the presence of Mrs. Holroyd! At first he was so utterly confounded, that he could only sit down and stare into the crown of his hat. Belle attributed his evident embarrassment to the dazzling effect of her own charms, and immediately set to work to converse in her gayest strain, in order to put him at his ease. She was the first person who had ever thought it necessary to attempt this feat with Captain La Touche! As she chatted with her usual fluency, he listened and looked. Truly, this is no shy girl of nineteen, but a woman ten years older, with a knowledge of the world, and a pleasant confidence in her own powers. He noted the elaborate elegance of her dress, the vivid

beauty of her dark, animated face ; but, despite their long lashes, her eyes had a hard expression, and her thin red lips spoke of cruelty, and temper.

However, he dissembled his feelings (like the immortal stage ruffian), and talked and flattered and laughed, in his most irresistible company manner.

Belle, on her side, was agreeably impressed by her suave and good-looking visitor. She remembered that he had given them a handsome wedding present, and was inclined to be more cordial than brides usually are, towards their husbands' bachelor friends. He discoursed of the station, she of her passage out. He asked how she liked her house, and she enquired if there were any balls coming off, and if the ladies of Mangobad were young and pretty !

"You must judge for yourself," he returned diplomatically, "you have brought us out one young lady, Miss Gay—Miss Rose Gay."

"Yes, and she ought to be called Miss Nosegay," returned Belle smartly. "You never saw such a feature out of *Punch*."

"Is she, then, not pretty?" he enquired with arched brows.

"Pretty, poor girl!" throwing up her hands, "her face is so hideous that I am sure it must hurt her!" and she laughed, and evidently expected her visitor to do the same, but he merely smiled and said, "At any rate she is very clever."

"Of course she is, like all ugly people; she is *said* to be very clever and good-natured; for my part, I loathe good-natured girls."

Mrs. Holroyd was outspoken, and not very amiable; this sharp tongue might prove a dangerous element in a small station. Presently he rose and took his leave. As he was quitting the room, his eye fell on a large photograph of

Betty. Belle noticed his glance, and hastening to take it up, said :

"Oh, you are looking at my cousin—my dearest friend ; she is a darling, not a beauty, as you may observe, but quite charming. I wish you could see her. I wish she was here." Captain La Touche sincerely echoed the wish, as he bowed himself out, and walked down the hall. He had never been so completely mystified in all his life. His friend had distinctly told him, that he was going to marry Betty—and who was Betty's substitute ?

On the steps of the porch, he met George, who had just ridden home from the ranges.

"I see you have been making your salaams," said he with well-affected nonchalance.

"Yes," acquiesced his comrade. But for the life of him he could not utter another word. He looked hard at his friend, his friend looked hard at him, and, from what he read in Holroyd's eyes, he dared not ask the question, that was burning on his tongue, so he got into his dog-cart in silence, and drove himself away.

Mrs. Holroyd's next visitor was the Collector, her namesake, Mr. Redmond. She knew that he was a rich, eccentric widower, just the sort of person that would repay a little cultivation, just the sort of person to invite her out to camp, and to give her diamonds and ponies, for was he not Betty's uncle ? She intended to make great capital out of her cousin, stand in her place and stroke his grey hair, and smooth his withered cheek, and call him "Uncle Bernard," but all these pretty little schemes were projected before she had *seen* Mr. Redmond. He was one of the relatives with whom old Brian had quarrelled most rancorously, and his offer to provide for his brother's orphan had been rudely scorned. In those days Mrs. Redmond was alive, and as she was not very enthusiastic

about her husband's niece, the matter had dropped. But now Mr. Redmond paid an early visit to the bride, not so much to do her honour, as to enquire about Betty. Bernard Redmond Esq., C.S., was a tall, square-shouldered man, with grizzled, sandy hair, a somewhat saturnine expression, and a masterful individuality. He was intellectual and deeply read, open-handed, hospitable and eccentric, was well aware that he was considered "peculiar," and took an unaffected delight in acting up to his reputation. In spite of his so-called odd opinions, he was extremely popular, for he gave a good dinner, and unimpeachable wine, played quite a first-class rubber, and was a sound authority on horseflesh. Mr. Redmond brooked no contradiction, was autocratic, and extraordinarily outspoken—traits that grew upon him year by year, and were fostered and nourished at Mangobad, where he ruled not only the district, but the station, and was to all intents and purposes its "uncrowned king."

Belle's pretty smiles and speeches, her graceful attitudes, and waving hands, were absolutely wasted on this cynical person with the cold grey eyes. He listened patiently to her chatter, and her views of life, mentally exclaiming "Good Lord! What a fool this woman is!" for the tone of her conversation jarred on him considerably; there was a great deal too much about Mrs. George Holroyd. Nevertheless he received a glowing description of his niece, in which description Belle painted herself as Betty's adviser, sister, and benefactress, and then he put one or two somewhat sharp questions—questions are a natural weapon in malignant hands.

"I remember your father," he said: "he died when I was a youngster. I suppose you were quite an infant at that time."

"Quite," she returned somewhat sharply.

"Betty is nineteen," he continued; "she has two hundred a year; pray, what becomes of her income?"

"I cannot tell," faltered Belle. "My mother knows" (she truly did).

"And I gather that she is at Noone acting as your mother's sick nurse?"

"She *lives* with mamma," replied Belle reddening.

"Ha—Hum!" rubbing his chin reflectively. Then putting on his glasses, and staring round, "I should not have known this house."

"No, I suppose not," complacently. "Pray, what do you think of my room?"

"Shall I really tell you what I think. Eh, honestly and without humbug?"

"Please do," prepared for some charming compliment.

"I think it just like a bazaar, with all these pictures, and ribbons, and cushions, and fans. I cannot help looking for the tickets, and expecting to hear you ask me to put into a raffle."

"Mr. Redmond," exclaimed Belle, intensely affronted. "It is very evident that you have not been in England for some years, and possibly then you may not have been in a *drawing-room*, or else I believe you are as great a bear as old Brian."

"To be sure I am," he returned with a delighted laugh. "I have often regretted the loss I have been to the diplomatic service! Don't you know that manners run in our family?"

"The want of them you mean," indignantly. "This room is got up in the very latest fashion."

"Like its mistress?" with a cool, deliberate stare.

"Yes. *We* attempt to be civilised!"

"And of course I know that I am miserably behindhand. A poor old mofussilite! Pray what's

that thing?" pointing to "Mossoo," who was coiled up in a chair. "Animal, vegetable or mineral?"

"It's my dog—a thoroughbred French poodle. I brought him with me."

"The latest fashion in poodles—I suppose. Eh?" focussing "Mossoo" with his glass. "I wonder what the dogs out here will take him for. How do you like India?"

"Extremely—I don't wish ever to go home; I hope I shall live and die out here!"

"You have only been out five weeks; wait till you have been out for five years, and you have heard the brain fever bird, and felt the hot winds, and seen a few snakes and scorpions! India is not a country; it is a climate."

"Thank you! I am not afraid of your horrors; I shall go to the hills, and I intend to enjoy myself in hills and plains, and to like India immensely. I suppose *you* were out here long before the Mutiny?"

"The Mutiny! Good gracious, my dear madam," exclaimed her visitor (whose one vulnerable point happened to be his age, and flattered himself that he did not look a day older than forty). "For what do you take me? Long before the Mutiny! Why I have only twenty-seven years' service."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not know; but I daresay climate tells on people—you *look* old."

"Thank you," he responded quickly. "I see that you understand the art of delicate flattery. Ah!" as a note was handed to her. "You have already begun to experience the real curse of India—chits, yes mam—chits are the curse of India, and I will leave you to enjoy your epistle alone; it is sure to be asking for something; your company at a dull dinner; the loan of a pattern, or of a

saddle; or a bottle of wine; or a dose of medicine!"

"Not at all," rejoined Belle, casting her eyes over it. "It is from Mr. Lovelace, sending snipe, and asking me to play tennis. I am afraid you take a gloomy view of life, and people in general."

"I take a gloomy view of *some* people, I must confess," and then he got up rather abruptly and made his adieux, and Belle had a disagreeable consciousness, that she had failed to make a good impression. Visions of diamonds, and ponies, faded back into cloudland, and she laughed aloud, as she pictured herself daring to pat this gruff outspoken connection on the head, much less to stroke his severe, sarcastic-looking face! As he whirled away, he remarked to his hot-tempered pony: "She is like you Judy, a Tartar, if ever there was one! She will want a tight curb and a strong hand over her. Poor Holroyd. Unfortunate devil!"

Belle's other visitors were more appreciative, and they came, all the ladies in the Station, in their latest Europe bonnets, and all the inquisitive young men, in their neatest ties and boots, and they were charmed with the bride—the latter especially. She had such splendid eyes, and so much to say for herself, and was so unaffected and agreeable. Why Mrs. Calvert and Miss Gay had not been *half* loud enough in her praises! They had not prepared them for such an acquisition to Mangobad. True, when one or two enthusiastic subalterns at the Club, had been eloquent on the subject of the lady's charms of person and manner, in the hearing of the Collector, he had merely grunted, and shrugged his shoulders, and called for a glass of "Kummel," but he was a regular old Diogenes, and no one minded his opinion, excepting on such matters as horses, whist, and wine.

Belle's letters home were full of her delightful new life, and her supreme happiness, and Mrs. Redmond read them to her friends, in a voice that shook with emotion. Her plans had succeeded far beyond her most sanguine hopes. In spite of what the Bible said, the wicked did prosper! After all, she had only done evil that good might come, and good *had* come. She did not fail to impart Belle's effusions to Betty—who listened with a white but smiling face—to Maria, and to Miss Dopping; accounts of tiffin parties, dinners, and dances, given for her as a bride, and what she had worn, and how her dress had fitted, and who had taken her in, and what people had said; also minute descriptions of her legion of servants, her house, her piano, her ponies, and her plate (a splendid and enlarged edition of the above was soon in circulation in the village), but there was scarcely an allusion to her lord and master. He was constantly on duty; he seemed to have an immensity to do; he looked ill, and had quite lost his spirits; he took no care of himself, and she intended to carry him off to some gay hill station for a complete change.

"It was not Belle's custom to talk of anything that was near her heart," explained her mother. "She is extremely anxious about him, I can see but her feelings are not on the surface."

"Nor anywhere else," muttered Miss Dopping; then aloud: "It strikes me that she seems a good deal *more* anxious about getting the creases out of her velvet dress! However, I am glad you are pleased. If she was my daughter, I'd rather hear less about her clothes and more about her husband."

* * * * *

Belle's triumphs had not been much over-rated. She was quite the latest novelty, and the acknowledged beauty of the station. Young men were

proud to be her partners in ball-room or tennis court. She was vivacious, amusing and accomplished; and her pretty dresses and her pretty speeches disarmed her would-be rivals. She took the place by storm as on board the *Nankin*, and no entertainment was complete without Mrs. Holroyd! She acted, she sang at penny readings, she composed people's fancy dresses, she played the harmonium in church, and was secretary to the tennis club. In fact, as old Sally Dopping would have said, "She had a finger in every pie." Her restless spirit, and excitable temperament, supplied her with sufficient energy to revolve in one untiring whirl from morn till midnight. She was always *en course*. She drove to the club before breakfast to read the papers and gossip; early in the afternoon, she went forth again, regardless of the sun, a syce holding an umbrella over her head, and "Mossoo" sitting sedately in the cart beside her, to tiffin parties, teas or tennis; then there were rehearsals for concerts, theatricals, choir practice, moonlight picnics and balls. For these latter Belle filled in her programme (in ink) days previously.

Home was the place where she slept, and breakfasted, and sometimes dined, but home was not where she "lived" in the true sense of the word. In it she expected no happiness for herself, and made none for others. Pleasure was her god, and to this she carried the sacrifice of her life. With constant gaiety came an incessant hunger, a craving for more. Not content with Mangobad she sighed for other fields to conquer; she went to this station, and to that, for the annual "Week," to Lucknow for the cup-races, to Allahabad for balls, bearing her husband in her train. Gay, vivacious, pretty, a born actress, a matchless dancer, Belle, as she playfully expressed it, "took" extremely well. George gratified all her whims, patiently hung

about ball-room doors till the early hours of the morning, carried her wraps, cashed her cheques, went her messages, and gave her freely and liberally of everything—except his company. For the first time in her existence, Belle was absolutely contented. This really *was* life—a life well worth living, a glorious realisation of all her hopes. But would it last?

CHAPTER XXVI.

MRS. HOLROYD DESIRES TO LOOK INTO THE PAST.

He has paid dear, very dear, for his whistle.

THIS gay butterfly life was not permanent! Before six months had passed, Mrs. Holroyd had ceased to be the joy and delight of the station. Before a year had elapsed, she had figuratively thrust a torch into her own roof tree, and set Mangobad in a blaze.

The honeymoon had barely waned, before George Holroyd discovered that he was married to an insanely jealous woman, with an ungovernable temper, and an untrammelled tongue. He had seen her tear an ill-fitting dress to shreds with the gestures of a maniac, he had seen her strike her ayah, and stamp at himself. True, she had subsequently offered a rupee to the ayah, and sobs and apologies to him, and that these outbreaks were always followed by scenes almost equally trying—fits of hysterical remorse, but the future looked gloomy, very gloomy. Belle was not in love with her husband, brave, handsome, and honest as he was. She would have (privately) jeered at the idea. She had a vague notion that she had been in love once—years ago—that she was constant to “a memory”—a gross mental deception; her first love was with her still, and confronted her daily in

the glass. Were the choice given her to be torn from her husband or "Mossoo," it would not have been "Mossoo." But he was a good-looking, presentable appendage, whose polo playing and hurdle racing reflected credit on herself. Since his marriage he had given up tennis and dancing, and to this she made no objection, for it kept him somewhat aloof from ladies' society. She could not endure to see him speaking to another young woman. She, herself, was to be admired by all; he was to admire no one.

As for George, he was woefully changed; he had become silent, solitary, and perhaps a little cynical. He had done his utmost to be a good husband to Belle, believing, in his folly, that she had been desperately in love with him, but he was soon disabused of *this* error. When at home, Belle was generally recruiting her exhausted powers; she read, and yawned, but rarely talked; and, when abroad, she never noticed her husband save to make jokes at his expense, and to send him on her errands. Many a day when he returned from barracks, fagged and weary, he found the bird flown, the nest empty, and the bird's absence a relief. "Mem Sahib bahar gaya." The Mem Sahib was too nervous to ride; she did not care for driving along monotonous roads, that led nowhere in particular. The splendid sunsets, the waving fields of yellow rice and millet, the majestic clumps of forest trees and picturesque rivers, with the cattle swimming homewards at sunset, had no charms for her, nor the dazzling flight of green parrots, nor the teak trees' feathery flowers—nor the *tête-à-tête* with George! No, no, she much preferred to bowl down to the club to hear the latest "gup," display her dresses, and play tennis. And her husband spent his time among the racket, and whist and billiard players, as if he were a mere

bachelor (Oh that he were?). At public and private entertainments, his wife constantly made him the hero of her little stories, and the butt of her jokes. This he bore without wincing, but when she levelled her shafts at others, he protested most emphatically.

One night they returned late from a large dinner party, where Belle had made herself surprisingly disagreeable, and had shown more than a glimpse of the cloven foot. Possibly something had irritated her—a supposed slight, a tight shoe, or, it might be, what Miss Dopping would have called “just pure divilment.” George followed her into the drawing-room, resolved to speak sternly, and to scotch the fire at once.

“Belle, what possessed you to-night?” he asked in sharp incisive tones, unlike his usual manner.

“What do you mean?” she snapped, turning on him quickly.

“You told Mrs. Craddock, who has fiery hair, that you never trusted a red-headed woman; they were invariably deceitful and ill-tempered.”

“Yes, quite true, so they are.”

“You told Colonel Scott that you despised all black regiments.”

“So I do.”

“You gave Mrs. Lundy, in polite words, the lie.”

“I did far worse than that!” exclaimed Belle triumphantly. “When we were all in the drawing-rooms afterwards, and talking of the fancy-ball, they appealed to me about Mrs. Mountain’s costume. I said she was so large, and her face was so red, she might wear her usual dress, with a paper frill round her neck, and go as a round of beef! And only fancy! She turns out to be Mrs. Lundy’s *mother*! Laugh George—*do* laugh.”

“No, certainly I shall not laugh. I am like Mr.

Redmond. I never see a joke after ten o'clock at night, even where there is one to see. I was amazed at you this evening; you abused people's friends, you abused my regiment. If you cannot restrain your tongue, we won't dine in public again."

"Who says so?" she demanded scornfully.

"I do," he rejoined with resolute determination.

"Pooh! you can stay by yourself then and I shall go alone, and all the better!" and she tossed her head with a gesture of defiance.

"If you do, it will be only once."

"Why?"

"Because I shall send you home," he answered with prompt sternness.

"Send me home. Ha! ha! ha! What a joke! To whom—to your mother?" and she burst into a scream of laughter.

"No to yours."

"I would not go—I will never go."

"We would soon see about that."

"Yes, we would. I would shriek, and scream, and have to be carried to the railway by force. I would make a scene at every station between this and Bombay; and if you *did* get me on board, I'd return in the pilot boat. No, no. Husband and wife should never be separated. Nothing but death should part them—nothing—but—death—shall—part—you and me," she concluded with laboured distinctness.

"Belle, you are talking nonsense; talking like a fool."

"Am I? but I am not such a fool as to go to the hills, or to hateful Ballingooole, and leave you here to flirt with Janie Wray."

"Miss Wray!" he echoed; "I have scarcely spoken ten words to her in my life."

"You see her out with the hounds when I cannot

look after you ; you gave her the brush—and I am told that she says you are the handsomest man in the station. She had better not let me see her flirting with you, that's all," she concluded excitedly.

"Miss Wray—it's too bad to talk of her in this way ! on my honour she is no more to me than that picture on the wall."

"Nor am I!" cried Belle fiercely. "Nor any woman! I don't believe you care a straw about me. I don't believe, in spite of the letter you wrote, that you ever loved me. Come——" suddenly walking up to him, "be honest, answer me."

"I married you—that is my answer," he replied after a pause.

"True, and I had no money—my face was my fortune," exclaimed Belle, gazing at him thoughtfully. "And yet I sometimes think that you are capable of *une grande passion*, of being desperately in love. Were you ever in love before you met me? Was there ever any other girl, George?" she exclaimed in a much sharper key. "George, speak! Why do you look so white? There *was* some one——"

"Do I ever ask to look into your past?" he interrupted impatiently.

"Then it's *true*—you have admitted as much. Who is she? Where is she? Have I seen her? Is she alive?"

Belle's eyes flamed like two lamps as she seized his arm and shook it violently.

"Ah—you won't tell me! George, if I dreamt that you cared for her still—I could kill her, do you hear? you had better keep us apart, you know I have a high spirit," and the lines of her face twitched convulsively.

"I know you have a high temper," calmly removing her hand. "And it is rather late hours for heroics. If you will take *my* advice, you will leave

my past alone—you will be more amiable at future entertainments, and you will now go to bed."

* * * * *

Belle was not very robust; according to her mother she had a great spirit in a frail body, and according to Captain La Touche "her engines were much too powerful for her frame." Her folly in braving the sun, and her life of ceaseless activity, began to tell; long before the hot weather was heralded in by that most obnoxious of the feathered tribe, "the brain fever bird." She suffered from fever and ague—her face became sallow, her eyes sunken, and her figure lost its roundness and her thin red lips their smile.

The climate of India is said to be trying to the temper, but Belle's temper was trying to the whole station. Once the novelty of her new house had worn off, she began to harry her domestics, with merciless energy; she was unreasonable, unmethodical, and capricious; and deplorably mean about small things. She foamed at the mouth over a lost *jharun* (duster), fined transgressors relentlessly, and in one great gust of fury, dismissed the whole respectable black-bearded retinue, without wages or character, but they gave her a fine character in the bazaars, and she subsequently discovered that no good self-respecting servant would engage with her, even for double wages. By the time she had been six months in Mangobad her household troubles were the joke of the place, but they were no joke to her husband; to him they were a most tragic reality. Belle began her day at six o'clock by bursting out of the house with a shriek at the milkman; then she had a painful scene with the cook and his accounts, and the daily giving out of the stores was looked upon as a sort of "forlorn hope." Belle had always been what Sally Dopping termed, very "near" in

her ideas—save with respect to outlay on her own little luxuries and personal adornment; and this trait in her character, had developed enormously of late, and pressed sorely on her unlucky retainers; she weighed out each chittack of butter, and each ounce of sugar, with her own fair hands; there was no latitude allowed in the matter of "ghee," and she made searching enquiries after empty bottles, and bare bones.

Only the bravest dared to face the Mem Sahib! Every egg, every bottle of lamp oil, every seer of gram, was figuratively fought over, and only wrested from her and carried off after a severe action. Naturally, it was but the very worst class of servants who would engage in her service—the incapable, drunken, dishonest, or miserably poor. She soon picked up sufficient of the vernacular to call them "idiots, pigs, and devils," and had a dreadful way of creeping unexpectedly about their godowns, and pouncing on them when they were enjoying the soothing "huka" at unlawful hours. Not a week passed without an explosion, and dismissal; in six months she had thirty cooks; George's life was wretched, especially since Belle had been compelled to relinquish some of her amusements, and had taken so fiercely to house-keeping; squalid meals (an hour late), dusty rooms, insolent attendants, and the shrill voice of the wife of his bosom, storming incessantly. Their little dinner parties covered him with shame and confusion, and although Belle, gaily dressed, talked and laughed vivaciously, and subsequently sang, what talking and singing can appease a hungry man? Mysterious soups, poisonous entrées—half full of cinders, a universal flavouring of mellow ghee, and, on one immortal occasion, cod liver oil handed about as a liqueur. Belle always declared that this particular "faux pas" was the act of a

diabolical "khitmatgar," who did it for spite. Be that as it may, it was but cold comfort to those unhappy guests who had swallowed a glass of noxious medicine, as a kind of "chasse" to a gruesome dinner! Mrs. Holroyd's temper developed month by month. Hasty speeches, furious retorts, combustible notes, dislocated various friendships. She quarrelled with the chaplain about a hymn—with Captain La Touche about a waltz—disputes over newspapers, tennis, flowers, precedence, embroiled her with half the station, and here she could not shift her sky, as in the good old days, when she roamed about with her mother, and their lives were a series of hegiras. No, it was now George's unhappy lot to be apologist and peacemaker, to interview angry and insulted ladies, and to draft copies of humble letters—occasionally the effect of these epistles was minimised, by Belle's surreptitious postscript, "I don't mean this letter in the *least*, but George made me write it."

Poor George! once (*only* once) he got out his revolver, and handled it meditatively; but no, what about his mother, and the regiment, and Betty? No, to take his own life would be the act of a coward. A climax came at last when the tennis tournament was in full swing. Belle played with her usual skill and vigour, but at lawn tennis it is a fatal mistake to become feverishly excited, and to lose your temper. Belle lost hers, and also the ladies' doubles. She fought desperately hard for the singles, the general and friendly interest in her adversary goading her to frenzy; after a most exciting match, she was beaten by one point, and in a transport of disappointment and rage, launched an anathema, and her bat, at her opponent's head.

The Mangobad community was kind. They talked of "a touch of the sun," and Belle was really laid up with intermittent fever. The doctor

conferred with George, and recommended Mrs. Holroyd a *complete* change of scene and a sea voyage! In short there was a universal feeling that either she, or the rest of the population, would have to leave the station—and she went.

Belle had a cousin in Melbourne, who (having never seen her) had sent her more than one pressing invitation. This invitation was now graciously accepted, and George escorted his wife and "Mossoo" down to Calcutta, put them on board a P. and O. in charge of the captain, and returned to Mangobad, a free man. Yes—for six months he was a free man; and he hoped that his joy was not indecently manifest.

He shut up his house, and departed on a two months' shooting trip with Captain La Touche. It was quite like old times, and, by mutual consent, they scrupulously avoided the remotest allusion to a certain absent lady. They became two collarless vagabonds. They went into Thibet, and had capital sport, and returned to the station at the very last hour of their leave, sun-burnt and satisfied, thirsting for regimental soda-water, and the latest regimental news.

The travellers had scarcely entered the mess, and hardly exchanged greetings with their friends, when an officious comrade rushed at George open-mouthed, saying: "Your wife is back, arrived three days ago; she only stayed a week in Australia."

"What?" stammered George, turning pale beneath his tan.

"Yes—I saw her yesterday. She returned in the same steamer, and is very fit. She loathed Melbourne, and said she knew you could not get on without her."

Alas! This was no hoax—it was painfully, pitifully true (and there was a unanimous im-

pression that Garwood might have kept his news till George had had his breakfast). Belle spent exactly ten days with her cousin—a strong-minded forcible woman, who told her some very wholesome facts, and made no objection to her premature departure. Belle detested Melbourne, and her relative—was afraid that George might be flirting (Poor George! he had had a lesson for life)—gave out that her health was completely restored, and that her husband was miserable in her absence, and so took ship.

But her Australian trip was of benefit to Mrs. Holroyd in more ways than one! She was more reasonable, more manageable, and more mild.

Long-suffering Mangobad noted the change with the deepest gratitude to Belle's unknown kinswoman, received the prodigal politely, and signed a treaty of peace.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. REDMOND'S CONFESSION.

"I'll tell to thee my hopes and fears,
And all my heart to thee confess."

—MAXWELL.

THE flame of Mrs. Redmond's life flickered along unsteadily from day to day, and month to month. She was now entirely bed-ridden, and the strain of constant nursing wore Betty down a good deal. Occasionally Maria Finny came and spent an hour or two in the sick room—and subsequently spread alarming reports in the village, where deaths and births were the only exciting events; a marriage was rare indeed. Once she even went so far as to assure Mrs. Maccabe, that the dying woman "could not possibly put over the night," and to request that a very superior sirloin (then hanging

in the shop) should be immediately set aside for the funeral breakfast! but when Maria hurried to Noone the next morning she found the invalid not merely alive, but better—better and fretful.

"Ah," she said in answer to Maria's query, "I was bad enough yesterday—yes, you thought I was going—I could have died if I *liked*, long ago, but I am holding on—holding on—at least till the next mail comes in."

All she seemed to care for now was the Indian mail, but how many mails came in and brought her no letters! Belle was enjoying herself without a thought of her. It was Betty who was her real daughter, the girl whom she had wronged. Every one else was going from her, and she was going from every one! The old lady was not in a happy frame of mind, she was filled with remorse now.

Betty's determined refusal of Ghosty Moore had opened her eyes, but had occasioned no surprise to Miss Dopping. That excellent lady had her own private views, and was truly concerned to see her young friend so hollow-eyed and pale, so different from what she used to be! But Betty never uttered a word of complaint, and she struggled along bravely under the heavy tasks imposed on her; she was a-foot all day—the first to rise, the last to go to rest. Miss Dopping drove over one afternoon to have a serious talk with Mrs. Redmond, about getting a professional nurse to take some of the load off Betty's shoulders, but the miserly patient turned a deaf ear to her suggestion. A trained nurse would require wages, she would certainly eat—possibly she would drink porter.

"Betty," she declared, "did very well. Betty could manage alone."

And as the wish was father to the thought, Mrs. Redmond believed it, and relapsed into her normal condition of torpid selfishness.

"I don't know what I should do without her, or what she will do without me," she groaned. "It's a great trial that she won't look at Ghosty Moore. She has refused him twice. I can't understand her, and the Moores so fond of her, and such a splendid connection, and for Belle too. It's too bad of Betty. Have you any idea of her real reason?"

"I believe I have," replied Miss Dopping with unexpected promptness. "I always thought that George Holroyd was in love with Betty, and that she had a fancy for him." As she spoke she looked sharply at her questioner, and Mrs. Redmond's face betrayed her; she was weak, and had lost the command of her countenance.

Her eyes fell, her lips twitched nervously, a faint guilty colour stole into her pallid face.

In a second the astute old maid had guessed all, and felt disposed to deal with her companion as Queen Elizabeth did with the Countess of Nottingham, and shake the dying woman in her bed, and declare that "God might forgive her, but she never would!"

"Then it *was* Betty?" leaning forward and speaking in a hoarse whisper.

"It was," returned the other in a still fainter key. "Now you know my secret—keep it."

"No—not from Betty—in all justice to George Holroyd, she shall know that he is a man of honour and did not break his pledge. Woman! what possessed you to ruin two lives, and peril your own immortal soul?"

"Belle is happy—I did it for her," protested the culprit.

"And is every one to be sacrificed to Belle? And *is* Belle happy? I know Holroyd is not; other people can write besides his wife. The Moores' niece says she would never have known him—he has grown so silent and careworn, and as

to Belle, I need not tell you what her temper is ! Nor that she cannot keep a servant, or a female friend. She is the scourge and heartscald of the station."

"He paid her great attention," faltered Mrs. Redmond. "She fully expected his offer."

"Not a bit of it," returned Miss Dopping scornfully. "She paid *him* great attention. I only hope she is half as attentive to him still ! Does she know ?"

"No one knows but Holroyd and myself."

"It was a bold game for an ailing old woman ! I have no doubt the devil helped you. How did you do it ?"

"I gave Betty's letter to Belle—I had only to change one word."

"Well, you must tell Betty at once."

"Don't you think she is happier not to know ?"

"Don't I think that you are a wicked, treacherous old creature ! She has blamed the wrong person for more than a year. Take your sin on your own head. If I were the girl, I would never forgive you. You have ruined her life and his. It would never surprise *me* if he took to drink, or if he were to shoot Belle. I believe *I'd* shoot her, if I was married to her."

"What nonsense you talk, old Sally Dopping !" exclaimed the invalid angrily. "George is a sane, respectable man ; he has got a very pretty, accomplished wife, and as to Betty—she is young——"

"She is, and before she is a week older she shall know that George Holroyd kept faith with her."

"I can't tell her—I won't tell her," protested the culprit irritably.

"Very well ! it would come better from you than me ; you may sweeten your story—I shali not. I give you three days' law, three days to make up your mind—not an hour longer."

And then Miss Dopping arose, holding herself unusually erect, seized her umbrella, and marched straight out of the room without another word—without even the formality of “Good afternoon.”

* * * * *

Mrs. Redmond endured Miss Dopping's daily “Have you told her?” for a whole week, before she mustered up her courage and spoke. It was at night time, when the house was closed and silent. Betty had been reading the Bible, seated at a small table, with the lamp-light falling on her face—a face that could not be implacable.

“Betty,” began the invalid suddenly, “I have something important to say to you. Open my dressing case—the key is in it, and take a letter out of the flap.”

Betty rose and did as desired. Mrs. Redmond received the letter with a shaking hand, saying, as she did so :

“Sit down and tell me something, Betty. Did it ever occur to you, that George Holroyd liked you?”

Betty, who had been standing hitherto, sat down, and faced her questioner with silent lips and piteous eyes.

“How could he?” she said at last in a very low voice. “He married Belle.”

“Yes, Betty, he did, and I must ease my mind and confess a great wrong to you before I die. He married Belle because I made him marry her.”

“You!—I don't understand.”

“You know that Belle was my idol ever since she was born. I would have died for her. I was prepared to make any sacrifice for her. I—I sacrificed *you* !”

Betty leant her arms on the table, and gazed at her aunt with a colourless face.

“The letter I gave to Belle was yours, addressed

under cover to me, to Miss Elisabeth Redmond; he only mentioned your name once. I was sorely tempted; the letter would apply equally well to Belle. I blotted out that word. I gave it to her, and now she is away at the other end of the world, dancing and singing and amusing herself, whilst you are the only comfort of the wicked woman who spoiled your life! But Belle fretted so dreadfully, her heart was set on change. She never dreamt that he cared for *you*. His proposal to you would have been an awful blow. I dared not tell her; you remember her attacks—her violent nervous attacks? A doctor once told me that her frenzies bordered on insanity, and that any sudden nervous shock might—might—“Betty dear,” lowering her voice, “you and I alone know—though we have never, never spoken of it—that sometimes she was a little strange—not quite herself.”

Betty recalled, with a shiver, one dark winter's night, when, after a day of terrible depression, Belle had appeared suddenly in the study, her hair wet, a table knife gleaming in her hand, and an odd wild look in her eyes. “Do you know what I have been doing?” she asked triumphantly.

“I felt that I must do something or go mad. I saw Maggie going out to the poultry yard with a knife and a candle. I went with her. I killed a fowl. I cut its throat. I *liked* doing it! Yes, I did.”

“Betty—Betty do not cover your face,” pleaded Mrs. Redmond. “Are you very, very angry?”

“Oh, what is the good of being angry?” moaned the girl, with a long shuddering sigh, and the old lady noticed that tears were trickling through her fingers. Tears not wholly of grief. It was balm to her wounded heart to know that, though lost to her for ever, George had not been false, nor she

willingly forsaken. He had been faithful. Poor George!

"Of course I know you will never forgive me," whimpered Mrs. Redmond. "You will go away, and leave me, and I shall die with no one near me but a strange hospital nurse, who will rob me out of the face. Oh! I am sorry I ever told you. It was all old Sally's doing. She *made* me."

"No—no—aunt, do not be afraid that I shall desert you; but oh! what must he think of me?"

"He knows all. I wrote very plainly, and here is his letter to me—keep it. It was a bold venture sending out Belle. I wonder I had the strength and nerve to go through that awful time. Supposing he had refused to marry her, and she had been cast adrift helpless and penniless! I declare I never had a real night's rest until I got the telegram to say that the wedding was over."

"You might have trusted him!"

"Yes, especially when I told him that you were soon to be married to Ghosty Moore, and had never given him a thought."

"Oh, Aunt Emma!"

The girl's voice was sharp with pain, and she trembled from head to foot.

"Yes, indeed, I stuck at nothing; but then I must say, that I had no suspicion that you liked George Holroyd, and I was confident that you would accept Augustus Moore. I wrote everything quite frankly to Holroyd—and he married Belle."

"Does she know?" enquired Betty faintly.

"Know? Oh, no! and never will; but after all I am afraid they are not very happy. He is sure not to understand her temper—it's all over so soon too, and poor girl, she is always sorry. Betty, you must promise me solemnly that he shall never know that *you* know."

"What does it matter?" she returned. "We

shall never meet again, but whether or no, I can make no promise."

"I—I suppose you would not go out to Belle?"

"*Aunt Emma!*"

"You know she is always wishing for you; she is a jealous girl, and of course if she knew, she would as soon have the plague in the house! Well, I must say, Betty, you have taken it beautifully; you are a dear good child; come and kiss me. I shall sleep all the better for having a load off my mind, and when you have settled the fire, and fixed the night-light, and given me my draught, you can go."

Mrs. Redmond slept peacefully that night, with heavy long-drawn snores, but Betty sat hour after hour in her window, with dry, tearless eyes, looking out upon the stars that seemed to return her gaze with sympathy, and shone with a frosty brightness. She was still sitting there when they began to pale. The next time Miss Dopping came to Noone she found Maria closeted with Betty, whilst the invalid was asleep.

"No letter from Belle this morning, I suppose?" enquired the old lady.

"No, but I heard of her," returned Maria with eager volubility. "I was at the Moores' yesterday and met their niece, who is just home from India. She saw Belle lately; she has lost every scrap of her looks, and is as yellow as a kite's claw; her temper has worn her to fiddle-strings, and they are as much afraid of her out there as if she were a mad dog! As to Holroyd, you would never know him; he is as grave and as silent as if he were at a priest's funeral. I always knew it would be a miserable match."

"Oh, *you* say that of every match, Maria," rejoined Miss Dopping. "I don't believe half I

hear. What about this new tea of Casey's? Have you tried it?"

"No," snapped Maria, who saw that the topic was disagreeable, and naturally pursued it. "I can't tell you anything about the tea, but I would be thankful if you would tell me what possessed young Holroyd to marry Isabella?"

Miss Sally's glance met Betty's.

Betty blushed, and she read in the girl's eyes that the tale had been told.

"He was no more in love with her than he was with *me*," continued Miss Finny emphatically. "Do you think she had any hold over him, or knew some secret in his past about money, or——?"

"Murder! say it out boldly. Secret in his past indeed," repeated Miss Dopping. "Tut, Tut, Maria! I could not have believed that a woman of your age could be such a fool, but of course there's no fool like an old one." Nevertheless Miss Dopping glanced somewhat nervously out of the corner of her eye at Betty. But Betty was staring into the fire.

A few days later Mrs. Redmond had passed away tranquilly in her sleep, with all Belle's letters—no great quantity—under her pillow, and Belle's most flattering photograph grasped in her rigid hand.

* * * * *

Mrs. Holroyd received the news of her mother's death in her usual extravagant fashion. She wept, and raved, and screamed, and roamed about the house in her dressing-gown, with her hair loose, subsisted on *sal volatile* and champagne, and angrily refused all comfort. She ordered the deepest mourning, and tied a wide black ribbon round "Mossos's" neck.

At the end of three days, she went out driving for the sake of her health, and despatched a very

business-like letter to Betty, respecting her darling mother's rings, and plate, and household effects. At the end of the week, she was playing tennis with her usual vigour and agility, and at the end of a month, even to her husband's surprise, she was talking of leaving off her crape, and regretting that she could not take part in some theatricals, and society (not easily scandalised) was shocked to see Belle subsequently give way to precisely the same violent outbreak of grief over a dead monkey as she had recently displayed at the death of her mother! And in future, society tapped its forehead and looked significant when it spoke of Mrs. Holroyd.

One afternoon, not long after her double bereavement, Belle was amazed and flattered to hear that the Collector Sahib was at the door, and to receive Mr. Redmond's card. He had come solely to talk to her about his niece Betty, he informed her with his usual bluntness. "Where is she now?" he enquired, as he carefully selected a seat. "Tell me all you know about her." Now that Mrs. Redmond was dead, he was resolved to assert his claim as her nearest of kin, and to import her to India as his companion, house-keeper, and adopted daughter—for, in spite of the tempting snares that were spread for him, he had no inclination to marry again.

"She is at Ballingooole with Miss Dopping. I wanted to have had her out, but George is so queer, he says married people are best alone."

"Some are," assented Mr. Redmond, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

"And although she is not very pretty, not the least like *me*, she would be quite a beauty among the hideous girls that are here. I'd have seen that she made a good match, and not married a wretched subaltern like George, but a Bengal

Civilian like yourself. Don't say that I never pay you a compliment!"

"Thank you," he replied, in his driest manner. "Tell me one thing, Mrs. Holroyd, does she resemble you in any way?"

"No," rejoined Belle with a triumphant laugh, "you would never dream that we were related. We are as opposite as the poles, and the same people never like us! I mean people that like Betty, hate me, and *vice versa*. She is tall, and has grey eyes and rides splendidly, and is quite a cook. *You* would appreciate that! She has wonderful spirits, and the nerves of a man, but she is not really pretty, or taking; she is not sympathetic with men; in fact, poor mother—she was so partial—always said she was a capital foil for *me*."

"I can easily believe it," he rejoined with an irony that was completely lost on his fair listener. "And what about her temper?"

"No one has ever seen her angry in her life—really angry, you know—of course she is cross now and then; she has that serene disposition that, mother said, always went with an insipid character."

"Your description enchants me! I delight in insipid people," exclaimed Mr. Redmond, rubbing his chin quite fiercely. "Ha, hum! a good cook, a good rider, plain, insipid, and serene. I shall write by the mail to-morrow—I am her nearest of kin—and ask her to come out and live with me."

"Oh, you dear, darling, delightful old man!" cried Belle, springing from her seat. "Oh, you angel, I declare I should like to kiss you, I really should."

"I beg, madam, that you will do nothing of the sort," backing away as he spoke. "And let me ask one thing. For goodness' sake don't go gabbling my plans all over the station. I hate to

have my private affairs discussed by a pack of women, and besides, she may not come. She may prefer Ballingoole and Miss Dopping."

"Miss Dopping will *send* her out—she thinks Betty is lost in Ballingoole. She often said so. She is sure to come! And to what a delightful home. Carriages, horses, and everything. I suppose you will give her the blue room? Can I help you to get it ready? Do tell me, can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, keep my news to yourself, that is all you can do. You may tell your husband, of course."

"Oh, I shall not mention it to a soul, you may rely on that; it shall be a dead secret between you and me. It will be capital fun. I shall keep it as a grand surprise for George."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GRAND SURPRISE FOR GEORGE.

"There is no armour against fate."

—SHIRLEY.

"Behind no prison gate, she said,
Which slurs the sunshine half a mile,
Live captives so uncomforted
As souls behind a smile."

—THE MASK.—MRS. BROWNING.

A FEW people in the station knew that the Collector was expecting a niece, but the news never reached George's ears. He did not frequent the ladies' room at the Club, nor other likely sources of general or particular information. Belle hugged her secret in silence, as far as he was concerned, and implored Captain La Touche (who had his suspicions about this other Miss Redmond, and was prepared to stand by for some frightful domestic explosion) not to breathe a word on the subject. It was to be a grand surprise for George.

Mr. Redmond himself escorted Betty from Bombay, and the morning after their arrival Belle hurried over at an early hour, to greet her cousin, whom she nearly smothered with her caresses. She looked critically at Betty, as they sat over "chota hazree" in the pretty fern-lined verandah, and she told herself that her cousin was much changed. She was more composed, more self-reliant, and—was it possible?—dignified. She carried herself with quite an air of distinction, and was remarkably well dressed. Belle would certainly think twice before patronising, bullying, or storming at *this* Betty. And how Belle's tongue ran on. She scarcely gave her companion time to answer a question; volubly setting forth her delight at her arrival, the condition of her own health, the state of her wardrobe, asking in one breath what sort of a passage she had had, how were the Finneys and Moores, and how hats were worn; giving hasty and not always pleasing sketches of the other ladies in the station, and winding up with an imperious command to come over and see her bungalow, "only next door, only in the next compound."

Betty assented, saying with a laugh, as Belle took her arm, "I don't even know what a compound is; it might be a lake or a parish."

Mrs. Holroyd had done up her house in honour of her cousin's arrival; rearranged the draperies, replaced the palms and re-adjusted the furniture, and proudly convoyed her from room to room.

"You will find George a good deal changed, very gloomy and silent," she remarked, as she displayed his dressing-room, with its rows of boots and saddlery. "My dear, you never know a man's *real* character till you marry him. In old days he used to be rather jolly, now——" and she turned up her eyes, and threw up her hands dramatically, "he

is like the chief mourner at a funeral. By the way, Betty, why did you not marry Ghosty Moore? You were mad to refuse him! I warn you that you won't do *half* as well out here."

"But I don't want to do half as well," returned Betty gaily.

"You don't mean to say, that you are going to be an old maid?"

"Why not? I am convinced that I should be a delightful one."

"Rubbish! I know the style. Godmother to every one's horrid baby; sick nurse to all the wheezy old women; *confidante* in love affairs; peace-maker, and general consoler in times of domestic affliction. Ugh! sooner than play such a rôle I'd die."

"No, no, Belle, you have a kind heart, you would play your part more creditably than you pretend."

"Look here, Betty," she exclaimed, inconsequently, "has he said a word about the diamonds? I suppose not yet—unless he mentioned them in the train. I mean your uncle, of course, and of course they will be yours. What a dry old creature he is. Quite gritty. Has he taken to you, dear?"

Betty blushed, and before she had time to answer, Belle added:

"He told me not to chatter about you; and only fancy, George does not know that you are expected, much less that you have *arrived*."

"What!" exclaimed Betty, her blush deepening to scarlet. "Oh, Belle, you are not in earnest!"

"To be sure I am in earnest. I kept it as a surprise for him," and as the sound of clattering hoofs was heard rapidly approaching—"Here he is."

She and her visitor were already in the hall, as George cantered under the porch, and she ran to

the door, screaming out, "George, guess who is here. Guess, guess!"

He, supposing it to be Captain La Touche, or some other brother officer, stood for a moment giving orders to his syce, and then turned to ascend the steps.

But who was this to whom Belle was clinging? His heart seemed to contract; his head felt dizzy—as he recognised *Betty*. Betty, grown to womanhood, and prettier than ever. In one lightning flash he contrasted the pair before him. The little dark, sallow woman, with the shining teeth and tropical eyes, who was the wife whom fate had sent him, and the pale, slight, graceful girl, who was his first love, his heart's desire, the wife that he had lost!

George, as he gazed, became as white as death; he slowly raised his chin strap, and removed his helmet, and ascended the steps with much clattering of sword and spurs. He could not speak, were it to save his life. The situation was too strong for him. He ventured to look at this rather stately maiden, expecting to see certain disdain, and possibly hatred in her eyes, but no, she met his gaze with a glance of unaffected friendship, and actually offered him her hand.

"George," cried Belle excitedly. "How funny you are! *Don't* you remember Betty? This has been my secret, and you don't know what it has cost me to keep it, but I thought that it would burst on you as such a delightful surprise."

George found his tongue at last, as he said in a level, expressionless voice: "This is indeed a most unexpected pleasure! When did you arrive?"

"Last evening by the mail."

"I little guessed when I heard yesterday that Mr. Redmond had gone to Bombay to meet a lady who that lady was. Belle," turning to his

garrulous wife, "I see that you *can* keep your own counsel."

"Can I not? Betty, you may trust me with all your love affairs. I am sure you have had at least *one*, and you will find me a most discreet *confidante*."

"How did you leave them all at Ballingoole?" enquired her husband precipitately.

"Very well, just as usual."

"And did you see my mother lately?"

"Yes, just before I started. I have brought you a small parcel from her and Cuckoo."

"I suppose she is growing up?"

"She *is* grown up, in her own estimation; she wears long dresses and has abolished her pigtail, and is really quite a nice-looking girl."

At this statement, Belle broke into a peal of derisive laughter, and said, "And pray what has become of Brown, Jones and Robinson?"

"Poor Brown is dead; he died of apoplexy, just like any rich old gentleman. Mrs. Finny has taken Robinson, and Miss Dopping, Jones. I was thinking of bringing him out, but I did not know whether Uncle Bernard liked dogs."

"And now you know that he is a dog-ridden man—dogs clamouring at his table, dogs at his heels, dogs everywhere."

"Yes, and all fox terriers, but none to compare with Jones. Uncle Bernard has told me to write for him, and as he is a dog of independent means he can pay his own passage. By the way, as I don't see him, I suppose 'Mossoo' is dead."

"*Dead*," echoed Belle in her shrillest key. "How dreadfully unfeeling you are, Betty! Do you suppose for one moment that you would see me laughing and talking if I had lost him? No, thank goodness! 'Mossoo' is in splendid health; this is his morning for the barber. If anything were to

happen to 'Mossoo,' it would break my heart. I always hope that I may die before him."

"Oh, Belle!" exclaimed her kinswoman in a shocked voice. "I see you are just as bad as ever, and now," opening her white umbrella, "I must be going. Uncle Bernard will think that I am lost. Good-bye Belle. Good-bye, Mr. Holroyd," and she went down the steps and walked quickly away, with Belle's last sentence ringing in her ears:

"Not Mr. Holroyd, Betty; you must call him *George*."

* * * * *

George had stood listening to his wife and her cousin like a man in a dream. Was it real—was this girl Betty?"

How bright and merry she was, how her eyes sparkled and smiled—was she a marvellous actress, a woman with matchless self-control; or else had she never cared? Most likely she had never cared.

She was young, and happy, and free, whilst he was bound, and fettered, and wretched.

"Well, George," said Belle angrily, "I really think you might have offered to walk back with her, I do indeed. It's rather hard on me that my husband can't be civil to the only friend I have in the world. Do you dislike her?"

"No, why should you suppose so?"

"Then why did you not *talk*? Why were you so stiff and ceremonious—so different from what you used to be at Noone? You hardly spoke to her, and she is like my own sister; you might have kissed her. I am sure she expected it."

"And I am sure she did nothing of the kind," he returned sharply, and then he went into his writing-room, closed the door, and took off his mask.

This was the refinement of torture, the devil himself had arranged this meeting!

Surely his lot was bad enough as it was—a squalid home, a scolding wife, a broken career. For staff appointments were inaccessible, he would not dream of applying for one. People would as soon have the cholera in the station as the notorious Mrs. Holroyd—and now, as the crown and flower of all his sorrows, here was Betty, come to witness the misery, the horror, the daily heart-sickening humiliation of his married life, and would naturally say to herself:

“It was for *this* he forsook and forgot me.”

And she would never know. He must be forever silent. In his mind's eye he saw Belle, with her irrepressible tongue, throwing a lurid light on their domestic life, on their quarrels, on their social misfortunes, and on all his shortcomings. At the very thought he clenched his hands fiercely, and great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He saw his future, the future he had chosen, stretching out before him—an awful, barren waste. He saw that he had made a hideous mistake, and the iron of a great despair entered into his soul.

* * * * *

“So you have been over the way *already*?” exclaimed Mr. Redmond as his niece joined him. “Why, you look quite pale, the journey has knocked you up, what possessed you to go out?”

“Oh, I am not the least tired; it is no distance; and you know we are very old friends. Belle came to fetch me.”

“As long as she does not come and fetch *me*, I don't care. Yes, my dear, I don't like your cousin; thank goodness, your very distant cousin. She is the only drawback to Mangobad.”

“Oh, Uncle Bernard, I am so sorry to hear you say so.”

“Do you like her?” he asked incredulously.

"Yes, of course I do," returned Betty, and she believed that she was speaking the truth.

"Well, my dear, you are the mistress of this house, and I wish to see you make yourself at home and happy. Have her here as much as ever you like when I am away, but I entreat and implore of you to keep us apart, I am afraid of my life of her. I am not joking—I am paralysed by the mere terror of her presence, I give you my honour—I am indeed."

In one respect George's prognostications were correct. Belle made Betty her *confidante*. She went over to see her daily, to "chota hazree" or tiffin or tea—always at hours when the master of the house was at Cutcherry. She liked to turn over Betty's dresses, to unburthen her mind, and to drive out in the Collector's easy landau, and under the wing of the Collector's pretty niece worm her way back into social importance. (No one recognised an effort on Betty's part, and she only knew it herself, when she realised what a relief it was to be alone with her uncle.) This was the bright side of the shield; it had its reverse. It was hard to see a girl, who had always been in the background, placed above her, living in a luxurious home, driving in London-built carriages, presiding at splendid dinners, and attended by obsequious scarlet and gold chaprassies. Luckily for her own peace, the new queen gave herself no airs; she was as kind, as generous, and as sympathetic as ever, but on one subject she refused—fiercely refused, to sympathise *George*. She would never listen to a word against him. Once she turned a white resolute face on Belle, and said very sternly:

"You say that he is an excellent husband, nurses you when you are ill, gives you everything you ask for, presses you to buy new dresses, and to go

to the hills, has never begun a quarrel, never gambles, drinks, or flirts; what do you want?"

"He is all you say, but he is odd. He—only to *you* would I tell this Bet——"

"Don't, don't, I won't hear it!" cried her companion passionately, and putting her fingers up to her ears.

"It's nothing bad," screamed Belle, pulling away one of her cousin's hands. "It is only this. George, I daresay, likes me as well as most men like their wives, and he is far more polite and considerate than one out of fifty, but I am sure he has never been in love with me. There is no harm in telling you what is true? I cannot grumble, for I have never been in love with him; we are not really sympathetic. He is scrupulously polite, and attentive and kind, but he hates 'Mossoo.' I have heard him swear at him, and he is so reserved and undemonstrative. There is a veil across his heart that I have never been able to tear aside. He as good as told me once, that he *had* liked some one—and once means always with him, he is so pig-headed! Oh, if I only knew who she had been, or who she *is*," and her eyes blazed dangerously, "how I could hate her. I suppose, Betty, you have no idea? You know the Malones so intimately. Did they ever drop a hint?"

"Never," she faltered in a low, quiet voice.

"Oh, well then I can't make it out! I should have thought you might have known—you were such friends with that odious little tell-tale Cuckoo—and that if anyone could have told me, it would have been *you*."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STORY IN HER EYES.

"Her eye in silence hath a speech,
Which eye best understands."

—MORLEY.

BETTY was considered quite an acquisition in the station (though, after its recent experience, the station was somewhat inclined to be coy in its reception of fascinating strangers). True, she neither sang nor acted, but she was pretty, young, and bright, played the hostess with surprising success, and rode well forward with the Bobbery Pack on her uncle's well-known racing pony, "Leading Article."

She received friendly advice about her health, and her ayah, and the necessary precautions to preserve her clothes, and her complexion, in the spirit in which it was meant, and was as popular as her cousin was the reverse.

Strange to say—or perhaps it was not very strange—she rarely saw George Holroyd save in the distance at polo or gymkhanas. In three months' time they had not exchanged three sentences. He was as distant, and as formal, as if they had never met before, and she was secretly hurt to notice that he avoided her purposely. But he could not avoid her on that miserable occasion, when she came to a dinner, given in her honour, at his own house.

The guests were twelve in number, and included, besides the Redmonds, Captain La Touche, the Calverts, and Miss Gay, also the Judge and Mrs.

Pope—the latter, an elderly lady, with a generous face and fine head, a woman good to know and look at, a woman to be relied on, and whose heart was so large that she could even spare a morsel for “poor queer Mrs. Holroyd.” The table was prettily decorated (by Betty), and there was no unfortunate mistake about the Chartreuse *this* time, but it was not a pleasant entertainment; the hostess was in a bad temper, the “plats” were abominable. Mr. Redmond was unusually “gritty”; to be frank, the Collector liked his dinner, he had had a long day at Cutcherry, and he was hungry, but this was dog’s food—“rateeb.”

Belle, with a touch of rouge on her cheeks and a feverish sparkle in her eyes, talked and laughed incessantly, with an occasional fierce aside to the servants, and a deadly thrust at her husband. She had strung up her nerves with a strong dose of sal volatile, and her sallies spared no one.

Poor George! Was he happy with the wrong woman at the head of the table, and the right woman on his left hand?

“George,” screamed the former, “just look at that wretch, he is handing round port instead of claret. He has given Miss Gay port and soda water, but *you* don’t mind what they do, nor help me one bit; as long as you can smoke and shoot, *you* are satisfied!”

During this agreeable speech everyone commenced to talk with feverish animation, so as to drown Mrs. Holroyd’s shrill voice. When the port was carefully and properly handed round, she began again:

“Betty,” she exclaimed, “don’t you think George has become very quiet? I notice that you and he have hardly opened your lips; is he not silent to what he used to be?”

“Perhaps, like the parrot, he *thinks* the more,”

growled Mr. Redmond, figuratively drawing his sword.

"Perhaps so, and like the parrot I shall have to give him a red chili to make him talk," rejoined Belle smartly.

"He could not be in better hands," retorted the Collector, "no one so capable as Mrs. Holroyd of giving him something *hot*."

Belle affected not to hear this pleasantry, and, turning to Captain La Touche, said abruptly:

"What is that French riddle you have just given Miss Gay?"

"Oh, a mere bagatelle. I will give you one for yourself if you care to guess it."

"I delight in French riddles, you know I am half French!"

"Then listen to this," counting on his plump white fingers.

" Mon premier c'est un Monstre,
Mon second c'est un Tyran,
Mon tout c'est le diable lui Même.
Mais si vous aimez mon premier,
Vous ne craindrez pas mon second,
Et mon tout c'est le bonheur suprême."

"I give it up," said Belle, after several ineffectual guesses, "although I am generally very good at them, and at all conundrums. It sounds rather odd. Is it quite *proper*?"

"Proper! My dear madam, the answer speaks for itself; the word is *Mariage*."

" Mon premier c'est un Monstre—Mari
Mon second c'est un Tyran—age
Mon tout c'est le diable lui Même."

"Yes, yes, I see, not at all bad," she exclaimed condescendingly, but she did not demand another French riddle; there had been a disagreeable significance in Mr. Redmond's expression, as he repeated "Mon tout c'est le diable lui même."

"Talking of marriages," she said, "I hear there is an end of Miss Lightwood's engagement to Captain Holster of the Pink Inexpressibles. Mr. Proudfoot told me, you know the horrible way he talks. He said that the regiment had headed him off, and that she was not 'classy' enough, or up to the form of the corps."

"Indeed, it is the first I have heard of it," returned Captain La Touche with some animation.

"I see you are delighted! Your eyes twinkle at the news, you horrid selfish bachelor; if you had your way no officer would marry."

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Holroyd, you must not give me such a character."

"But I must! I believe you think there ought to be a sort of committee on every girl before a comrade is allowed to propose to her. I wonder if you would have passed *me*? You don't answer; then I shall take silence for consent?"

"Such a novel suggestion took my breath away, and deprived me for the moment of the power of speech. I am dumb, simply because the question is so utterly superfluous."

Belle smiled and tittered, accepting this double-edged compliment entirely from Lord Chesterfield's point of view, and then turned to her other neighbour. She had already heard him, at an early period in the feast, saying to his servant, as he gave his plate an impatient push:

"Here! take this away; get me some dry toast," and now he was turning and re-turning his pudding with a palpably scornful spoon! As she watched him she felt her heart grow hot within her.

"I am afraid you have no appetite," she observed in her sharpest key. "I *thought* you were looking rather yellow and out of sorts."

"Never felt better in my life, hungry as a hunter;



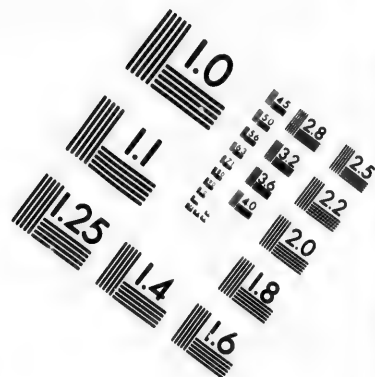
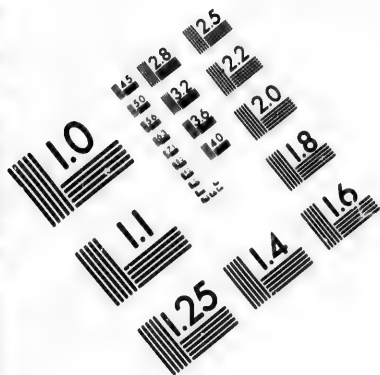
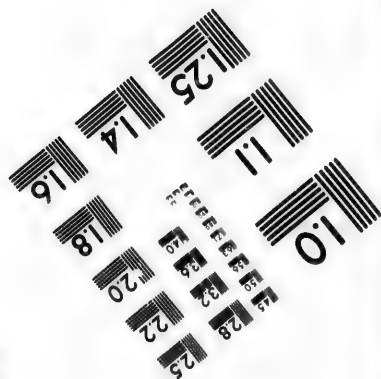
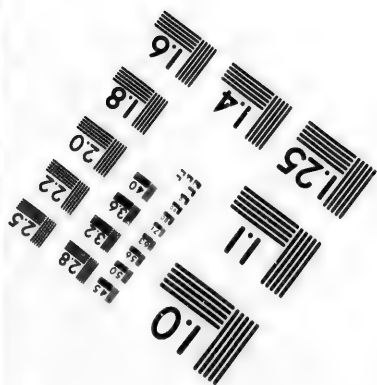
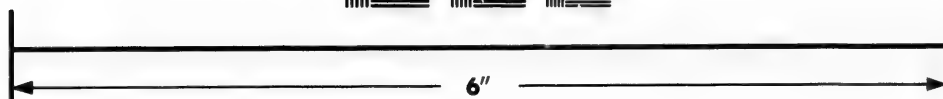
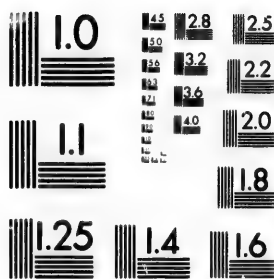


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but, my dear madam, *what* is this new dish? Did you make it yourself?"

"A *vol au vent* of plantains, you dreadful *bon vivant*. Is it true that your first question every morning is to ask how the wind is, to see if your club mutton may hang a day longer?"

"A base libel, an invention of the enemy," he returned emphatically; and, so saying, he seized his glass, dashed a quantity of sherry into his plate, and hastily gulped down its contents. Then, as he caught the fiery eye of his hostess, he saw that she was working herself into a frame of mind that might be troublesome, and said with his blandest air:

"I notice that you have a pair of fine new pictures," screwing his glass into his eye. "I have not seen them before."

"Yes—I picked them up at an auction, and I am rather proud of my purchase, though George there," with a withering glance at her husband, "says that the Alps by moonlight might be taken for some haystacks round a puddle, and that lovely sunset at sea, for a dish of eggs and bacon. Now tell me your opinion of them frankly; for I believe you *do* know something about art!"

"As well as I can judge from this distance, and, in fact, not being much of a judge at any distance, I should say that these pictures are oil paintings of some notoriety. And in fact, rather remarkable productions. I give you my word of honour I have not seen anything *like* them for a long time; you have secured something quite out of the common——"

"Ah, really," looking steadfastly into his grave, impassive face. "Well then, since I have had your opinion, I shall promote them to the drawing-room at once. I shall promote *myself* there now."

And presently she and her lady guests arose

and departed. When the gentlemen rejoined the rest of the company, there was the usual after-dinner music. Belle opened the concert with a sparkling little ballad, and Betty played one of Scharwenker's wild, weird Polish dances that seemed to set every one thinking of their past. Miss Gay sang by special request "Forever and Forever." As her rich and sympathetic voice rang through the room, with its too appropriate words, Betty bent her face over a book of photographs, and never once raised it. Her head ached, she was nervous and constrained, and despite her subsequent efforts to be gay and conversational, more than one remarked "that pretty Miss Redmond seemed pale and out of spirits." She was most thankful when Mrs. Pope rose, and gave the signal for her own release. She had been figuratively on the rack all that miserable evening. The exposé of George's wretched home wrung her very heart. If Belle had made him happy, if there had been no shame for her in her thoughts, no pity for him, it would have been different, oh! so very different. She would not—she was sure—have felt this dreadful tightness in her throat, and this insane impulse to burst out crying. The worn-looking, grave young man who escorted her down the hall, but did not offer to put on her cloak, could he be the same George Holroyd that used to take her and Cuckoo out schooling through the fields behind Bridgetstown, and make the keen wintry air ring with his cheery laugh?

"Well, George! How do you think it went off?" enquired Belle, when the last guest had taken a peg, a cheroot, and his departure, and she threw herself yawning into a chair.

George stood with his hands in his pockets, and looked intently at his boots, and made no reply.

"I think every one enjoyed themselves: it was

quite a success. How do you think Betty was looking?"

"Oh, as usual," without raising his eyes.

"Of course you don't admire her, I know; she was pale to-night, but maybe that was her dress; pink does not suit Betty. Mrs. Pope has taken such a fancy to her."

"Has she?"

"She is nearly as enthusiastic as Sally Dopping; she thinks Betty is so pretty, and interesting-looking! And what *do* you think the funny old woman says? She declares that Betty has a story in her eyes."

"A what? A sty in her eye?"

"A *story* in her eyes! Isn't it a preposterous idea? I asked her what she meant, and she nodded and smiled in that exaggerated way of hers and said: 'I am sure I am right, ask her to *tell* it to you, my dear!' It was on the tip of my tongue to say, that *she* had a story in her mouth, for you know as well as I do that Betty never cared for anyone in her life in that way; a story in her eyes indeed!"

As Mr. Redmond and his niece walked home, with a lantern carried before them as a precaution against snakes, he said: "Thank goodness that's over and we need not go again. Betty, is there any cold meat in the house?"

"Yes, cold corned beef, a nice hump."

"Good! What a dinner! What courage Holroyd had to marry that woman; he ought to be decorated with a V. C. What a temper she has."

"Yes, it's rather hot certainly."

"Hot is no name for it. Holroyd acts as a sort of fire-engine between her and the station. Poor chap! I often see his eyes fixed on her at dinners with a sort of desperate apprehension as to what

she will say *next*! I wonder what possessed Holroyd to marry her. Do you know?"

No answer.

"She is not young, she has no money, her looks are going. She can talk, I grant you! It is a pity that such power of utterance is not united to more intelligence; in many ways she is an absolute fool."

"Oh, no, Uncle Bernard, indeed she is not," protested his companion. "She may not be what you would call intellectual, but she is very bright, she has plenty of sense."

"If she has sense then heaven help those who have none. Well—well—she always rubs *me* up the wrong way. I don't believe she has an ounce of brains, but you think differently, and we won't fall out. We will never fall out, you and I, Bet! You are an amiable girl, and make allowances for everyone, and can be happy and at ease even with that woman in the next compound."

But what, oh most learned yet ignorant Collector! what about the *man* in the next compound?

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. REDMOND'S AMBASSADOR.

"Words that weep, and tears that speak."

—COWLEY.

GEORGE HOLROYD avoided the ladies' room in the Club, the groups of ladies under the trees outside; he did not play tennis, and, owing to his wife's mourning, he was not on duty at dances; therefore he and Betty rarely met, unless they came across one another out hunting.

On these matchless Indian mornings and evenings, when they drew the biakes and nullahs,

and found; when there was a sound of horn and a rush and clatter of hoofs among the long grass and cane stubble, away over the plains, scattering dust and sand on the bye roads, away, away after the wiry little grey fox with his black-tipped brush, and the fleeting, irregular pack of all sorts and conditions of dogs, Polygars, Rampore hounds, pariahs and fox terriers. Through the fields, scattering the cattle, through the woods, startling the fruit watchers, through shallow rivers rousing the submerged water buffaloes. How good it is to be young, with every pulse throbbing, every nerve straining, away to where a little cloud of dust and a momentary scuffle, betoken a kill in the open.

Tippoo and Sultan, the long-legged Polygars, have overtaken and slain the fox. Poor Mr. Fox! You will never see your little family again, will never again bring them home a tender guinea fowl, or a fat pea chick; they will sit at the sunny side of the bamboo clump and watch for your return in vain. Your thick, black-tipped brush hangs at Miss Redmond's saddle bow, as she turns homewards, leading the van, charging through melon fields, scouring over tracts of sands, jumping nullahs, fording rivers. But Mr. Holroyd, who was well to the front during the run, now reins in his hot-tempered Australian and lags conspicuously in the rear—Why? Only he and Betty knew the reason.

About six weeks before Christmas Mr. Redmond went out into camp for what is called the "cold weather tour." It is a Collector's duty to visit his tahsils or out-stations, and examine the general condition of his district, receive petitions and inspect tracts affected by flood or famine; it is thus that he sees the result of his previous six months' government. Mr. Redmond departed from Mangobad, with the usual pomp and imposing train of camels, tents, horses and elephants, and

Betty accompanied him. It was all new to her—a delightful novel life, and a blessed relief from the painful strain of her daily existence in cantonments, where the vicinity of George, and the perpetual presence of Belle, was—only to her inmost thoughts did she whisper it—becoming insupportable. She enjoyed the change and complete freedom; the glories of a tropical dawn; the early marches through strange surroundings; the halts in the mango topes; the keen, exhilarating air, and at night the great wood fires. She was left a good deal to herself, and this she enjoyed also, whilst her uncle conferred with his sleek serishtadars, received thousands of petitions, and dallies! strings of evil-smelling yellow marigolds, and sweet pink roses, and many visits from native gentlemen, on elephants, or in palanquins. During these solitary hours, she read, or worked, or wandered about the adjacent jungle, in company with her own thoughts. Truly nature is a great physician of souls! The peace of the place descended into her heart, and soothed and hushed its repinings, as she drank in the exquisite atmosphere, the living silence of the jungle, broken only by the sound of her own footsteps, as she strolled beneath the Kuchnar, and sweet-smelling cork trees—treading tenderly on their fallen, withering flowers. She determined to be brave, to shut her eyes to the past, to make the best of the present, and of the new life that lay before her. She was only twenty, and she would not permit one misfortune to shadow all her days. She was resolved to make a second start, but she did not want a second lover. No! Although she assured herself emphatically that she had now no other feeling for George than sisterly affection, and intense pity, she meant to figuratively lock up her heart and throw away the key. She would not, and could not, bestow it on Mr. Hammond, Mr.

Redmond's friend—clever, agreeable, and popular as he was. No, nor on Captain La Touche, nor yet on Mr. Proudfoot. She would be her uncle's life-long companion, she would bury the past, she would bear with Belle, and would think more of others and less of herself, and her own troubles. These, and many other good resolutions, came flocking round her as she strolled about the camp by day, or sat outside the tents—whilst Mr. Redmond dozed in his chair—staring into the big red fire in the still, cool night—a stillness only broken by the baying of pariah dogs in distant villages, the howl of the hungry, melancholy jackal, the shouts of the watchers in the fields scaring wild beasts from the crops of sugar-cane, bajra and jowar. But life was not always quiet and solitary. When the camp happened to be within a reasonable distance, many well-known faces from Mangobad surrounded the great, blazing logs, and many familiar voices, broke the usual majestic silence.

The hospitable Collector invited out most of his friends, and Betty asked Mrs. Holroyd, but she remained only two days. She detested rural life, and so did "Mossoo." She hated the spear grass that got into her petticoats and stockings, suspected snakes under every chair, and became hysterical on an elephant. She longed for her own safe fireside, her book and her arm chair. Her husband had declined altogether, pleading duty. But one evening Mr. Redmond came across Captain La Touche and him, out shooting, and absolutely refused to take nay—it was Christmas Eve—he had at least twenty guests—he intended to have twenty-two—Mrs. Holroyd was in Lucknow, and Mr. Holroyd had not the ghost of an excuse! There was a grand Christmas dinner—with pretty Indian jungle decorations, real English

plum-pudding, a monster turkey, and plenty of crackers, and good wishes. Afterwards the company set out in the moonlight to explore the camp, and visit the elephants and horses, before assembling around the great log fire to drink punch or mulled port, and play games. The night was clear and cold; and wrapped in a long red fur-lined cloak, Betty strolled now with one guest, now another, and finally found herself pacing the short dry grass—beyond the tents, with her uncle and George Holroyd! It was a magnificent eastern night—such a night as entitles India to be called the land of the moon, as well as the land of the sun. The scene was almost as bright as day, and almost as still as death. Behind the Collector lay his snow-white camp beneath the mango trees—before him, a plateau, on the edge of which a mosque-shaped tomb stood out in dark relief against the sky—beyond the tomb, a wide plain, stretching away to the horizon, a rich cultivated tract, unbroken by aught save an occasional clump of sugar-cane, an occasional reedy jheel, with its fringe of waving water plants, and here and there, a great single forest tree.

"How quiet it is out here," said Betty; "there is not a sound save the night jar. I quite miss the bugles at Mangobad."

"Can you distinguish them?" enquired George.

"No, I don't think I can—except that one that seems to say, 'come home—come home—come home.'"

"The last post," explained her uncle. "I know them all down to the advance, ending in three C's. How many a gallant fellow *it* has cost us! Did you get any snipe to-day, Holroyd?"

"Yes, but only four brace."

"I went out yesterday, myself, to a most lovely

spot, an ideal home for a snipe, and never saw a feather! Just a nice cover; nice feeding ground. If I were a snipe, I would go and settle there at once, and take my family with me."

"Is it possible that I see people ploughing at this hour, Uncle?" interrupted Betty. "Six ploughs—beyond that brown patch."

"Very possible! In the indigo season, it's a common thing for them to plough all night. I suppose it is ten o'clock now. That reminds me that I have business with my sheristadar, and I must be going back, but you, Betty, need not come. Take Holroyd on and show him the tomb, it's rather old and curious," and turning quickly on his heel he left them abruptly; left them to their first *tête-à-tête* since they had parted that July day in the avenue at Noone.

"I must congratulate you on getting your company," said Betty, as they walked on together. "I heard the news just before dinner—I am so glad."

Glad she might be, but she could scarcely command her voice. Oh, why had Uncle Bernard left them? left her without a pretence of escape. She must make the best of the situation, and summon all her self-possession and all her woman's wit, to keep clear of one topic.

"Thank you. Yes, everything comes to those who wait."

"Belle will be delighted," she ventured in a sort of panic, fearing that if she stopped talking he would commence on that subject.

"Yes," and he added with somewhat dreary levity, "she does not care about being 'a subaltern's poor thing.'" A long pause, during which their own footsteps on the baked, dry grass, was the only sound.

"I had a letter from Cuckoo last mail," continued

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the girl, making a valiant effort to keep up the conversation; anything, anything, but this dead suggestive silence.

"Yes, and I had one from my mother. Denis is coming home. He cannot get any congenial employment, and he and Lizzie don't seem to hit it off."

"I am sorry to hear it, but these hasty marriages do not often turn out well." She halted abruptly—her companion's own marriage had been a hasty one—and then plunged into another subject.

"I saw you and uncle discussing something very serious this evening before dinner. When uncle nods his head, and walks with his hands behind him, I know he is talking of something interesting and important."

"Yes, you are quite right. He was talking of *you*."

"Of me?" with a sort of breathless gasp.

"He has got some wild idea that I have influence with you, and he asked me as an old and entirely disinterested friend—not likely to have a woman's love of match-making—to speak to you about Mr. Hammond."

"To speak to me about Mr. Hammond! I am sick of hearing about Mr. Hammond. Uncle, Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Calvert, can talk of nothing else."

"He is not young, but he is not old," continued George, "he is a remarkably able man, he will be in Council some day, he is an honourable upright gentleman. I quote your uncle's words exactly, and your uncle, although he cannot bear to lose you, says that Hammond is his personal friend, and he does not wish to stand in the way of your making a good match, and he asked me to speak to you, as an old acquaintance and to beg you to think it over. Think of your carriages, and diamonds, think of all the ladies old enough

to be your mother, who must walk behind you into a room. Think." They had now reached the tomb and were standing at its horse-shoe shaped entrance. He stopped abruptly, and leaning his shoulder against the wall behind him, looked hard at his companion.

"Does it not seem strange," he went on in a totally altered voice, "that such a mission should be entrusted to *me*—of all men living?"

Betty affected not to notice the change in his manner, and said with her calmest air, and in a firm tone:

"I like Mr. Hammond immensely as a friend, but he is thirty years older than I am, and I do not choose——"

"To be an old man's darling!" supplemented her companion sharply.

"No—I was going to say, change my estate. I am very happy as I am," lifting her eyes from the moon-lit plain, and looking straight and full at her questioner.

"Yet I don't mind betting that before very long you will disappear from Mangobad amid a cloud of rice, and with the inevitable slipper on the top of the carriage. Proudfoot is not so ancient."

Mr. Proudfoot was a handsome and superlatively conceited young man—(his conceit probably the result of an uncriticised career)—who played the banjo, and sang sweetly, and constantly assured his lady friends that he had been *such* a pretty boy. He paid Betty conspicuous attention, and was at this moment eagerly searching for her in every direction, but she and her companion were standing on the far side of the mosque steps, and its substantial walls were between them and the camp.

"Shall I tell you a secret?" said Betty suddenly.

"Do," he returned with a slight start, but recovering himself instantly.

"I cannot endure the Golden Butterfly" (Mr. Proudfoot's nickname).

"Why—what has he done? Has anyone told you anything?"

"He has told me everything himself," she returned with a smile into the grave face beside her. "He dined with us, one evening; we had the Trotters to dinner too, and he confided to me, as we sat behind the piano, that when he was at home—I must try and quote his own words as you did uncle's—he met Mrs. Trotter in the Park, and she came bustling up to him; 'for the life of me,' he said, 'I could not remember her name, though I remembered her face and dinners, for when I was at that hole, Sonapore, she was there, and I used to be in and out a good deal. But by George! Sonapore is one place, and London is another, one does not come home to see one's *Indian* friends, eh? I was not going to allow her to fasten herself on to me, and such a dowdy too! So I just took off my hat, and walked on—cut her so to speak, and now, *she* cuts me!' What do you think of such a nice, grateful, gentlemanly young man?"

"I am not surprised—my opinion of him remains unchanged; but he still seems to find favour in *your* eyes—he sat beside you at dinner and appears to make himself agreeable."

"He bored me to death, about society at home, and his clubs."

"Clubs! I don't believe he ever belonged to one in his life, except a *Mutton Club*"—remarked Captain Holroyd scornfully. A ghurree in the camp now struck ten, and turning to her abruptly, he said in a voice that made her heart stand still:

"Betty, let us drop this hideous farce for five minutes, this Christmas night, and speak plainly to

one another, face to face. I wonder that you look at me, much less talk and laugh with me, when I know what you think of me at the bottom of your heart. Wait"—seeing that she was about to speak—"I never was so astonished as when I saw you on our own steps. I had not a suspicion that you were coming out. Had I known, I would have got an exchange; got leave, got *anything*, that would have taken me out of the station, and out of your sight, and you actually offered me your hand—but some women are angels!"

"I am no angel," returned Betty almost inaudibly, "far from it. Do not let us speak of the past, it is done with, it is dead. There is no reason why we should not be friends."

"Then, Betty," he exclaimed, looking at her keenly, "*you know?*"

Betty did not speak; she turned away her face, and gazed over the great far-stretching landscape, bathed in moonlight; she saw nothing of its placid beauty, for her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"Answer me," he insisted.

She bowed her head without looking towards him.

"Who told you?" he asked after an appreciable silence.

"Mrs. Redmond," she replied in a choked voice. "She gave me your letter to her, before she died."

"Betty, did I—did she—nearly break your heart?"

"It is all over now," she returned in a low voice.

"Abominable old woman! As long as I draw breath I shall never forgive her."

"Oh, George, do not say that; you must forgive her, you will forgive her. I have done so long ago. It is all over, and done with *now* for ever." As she

spoke her sweet firm lips were set in a line that was almost stern.

"Over and done with for you—never over for me. But why should I expect you to care? the past, as you say, is dead, dead and buried. However, it is some comfort to me, to hear that you know that I was not a heartless scoundrel."

"I never thought that," she returned with a tremor in her voice.

"And I, miserable fool, never doubted a line of Mrs. Redmond's letter. I accepted it all with unquestioning conviction. I knew that Moore was in love with you, and as you were lost to me—I married Belle. Belle, who came out to be my wife in all good faith, believing that I loved her, and assuring me of her own attachment. She was your cousin. She was homeless and friendless in this country, and totally unsuspecting of her mother's crime—for it *was* a crime—I could not send her back, shamed and slighted, to Ballingoole. I did what I believe any man of honour would do. I married her. I did not care what became of the rest of my life—and I gave it to her, no great gift!—and I honestly meant to make the best of things for her sake—but oh—my God—!" he exclaimed hoarsely—"if I had only known the truth——!"

Betty listened, with white parted lips, and then said in a low voice: "And *she* must never know."

"No—of course not. I am glad I had this chance of speaking to you at last, and thankful for what you tell me—to hear that you knew the truth—to know that you did not feel——"

"Not feel," she echoed with a start, and a thrill in her voice. "George, I too will speak, just once—and never again. It cannot be wrong to tell you now—that it did nearly break my heart, it was so unexpected, so sudden, and I was—" she was about to add—"so fond of you," but looking into

her companion's penetrating dark eyes, she faltered—"I could tell no one—I had to bear it alone—no one knows—no one ever will know, only you and me! But I could not let you suppose that I did not feel—and George, as it is all over now—as it was not to be—let us not be cowards."

"No," he interrupted fiercely. "Once I was going to shoot myself, but you see I thought better of it."

"Let us not be cowards," she repeated with quivering lips. "Let us make the very most of our lives, and try and make other people happy. When I hear of you doing something good and noble, that will be *my* happiness."

Tears were very near the beautiful eyes, that looked with sad wistfulness into his.

"And when I hear of your marriage with some wealthy Civilian," he sneered, "I suppose that is to be *mine*."

"Oh! George," she exclaimed, with two large tears now trickling down her face, "don't talk in that way. It is not like you! You once told me that a man could be whatever he willed—man is man and master of his fate—you are still the master of yours."

"My fate was too strong for me! Mrs. Redmond herself, like one of those ancient witches, cut it across with a pair of shears. It is not her fault that I have not gone to the devil. I believe I shall get there yet."

"No, you are only saying this to frighten me, and I am not afraid. You will make the best of your life. You will forgive and forget."

"Never!"

"Yes—I know you better than you do yourself although you *are* so changed!" the last words came in a kind of sob.

"Changed!" he echoed with sudden com-

punction. "Yes, but not so changed as to behave like a brute to you! Forgive me, Betty—I will—I do—try to forgive, but I shall not try to forget. I will shake off, if I can, the sort of deadly paralysis that comes over me—I shall volunteer for our next little war. As for you, whatever good luck you have"—and he gulped down something in his throat—"no matter in what shape it comes—and whatever happiness may fall into your life—it will be good fortune and happiness for me. Betty, do you remember Juggy at the Gate Lodge! She said you had a lucky face! And I have a strong presentiment that you were not born to trouble, but that you have many bright days in store for you somewhere. As for myself——"

He paused, for Mr. Proudfoot, still searching, had suddenly turned the corner of the tomb, and stood within three yards of him. It was almost on that young man's lips to say "I beg your pardon," for Holroyd was as white as death, and Miss Redmond had been crying. Yes, she had actually her handkerchief in her hand, although she exclaimed, with wonderful composure, "Oh, Mr. Proudfoot I am quite ready. I suppose uncle has sent you to look for me. I had no idea it was so late. I must go back at once," and she hurried down the steps, accompanied by the two men. Half way to camp, they encountered Mr. Redmond, who called out in his loud, cheery voice:

"Well, Holroyd, what do you think of the tomb? Rather fine, is it not? They say it was built by Jahangir." Holroyd muttered something inarticulate. Neither he nor Betty had cast one single glance at the object of their walk. They might as well have been standing beside a blank wall, for all the interest they had taken in this tomb, which was one of the sights of the district.

Betty went straight to her tent, and was seen no

more that evening, and George departed from the camp at daybreak. The reason of this sudden move was explained by Mr. Proudfoot in the strictest confidence to some half-dozen listeners :

"Holroyd and Miss Redmond had had no end of a shindy, and he had walked into the thick of it behind the big tomb—no doubt that little devil Mrs. Holroyd had made some mischief between them."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOMETHING TO READ.

"And thereby hangs a tale."

—OTHELLO.

WITH the first appearance of punkhas, and the first "notice about ice" most of the people at Mangobad fled away to Simla, Mussoorie, or Naini-Tal—chiefly to Naini-Tal. Mr. Redmond's face was an amusing study (in black) when Belle suggested in her most kittenish and effusive manner, that "she should share a house with him, as George could only get two months' leave, and that it would be great fun to live together!" but Mr. Redmond grimly declined this unalluring proposition in a few brief words, and subsequently (purposely) took a mansion that set the whole length of the lake, and a distance of two miles, between his abode and Mrs. Holroyd's cheap, damp, out-of-the-way little bungalow—for Belle was now nothing if not economical, and thrifty, to the verge of parsimony, save in the matter of her personal adornment. Naini-Tal, named after the goddess Naini (or Nynee), is a lake that lies six thousand feet above the plains, in the lap of the Himalayas; the surrounding hills rise from the edge of the water and are covered with houses

half hidden among trees. These houses are reached by narrow paths, in some instances goat tracks, and the only means of locomotion is either on a pony's back, or in a jhampan or dandy, carried on the shoulders of four men. A jhampan—the gondola of the hills—is something between a chair and a coffin, and, to an uneducated eye, the first glimpse of Naini-Tal, with its crowds of people being borne along, suggests the victims of some frightful colliery or railway accident. But a nearer inspection shows smartly dressed ladies, and gaily painted dandies, and jhampannies in gorgeous liveries. Each memsahib dresses her bearers brilliantly, and racks her brains to devise some novelty that will distinguish her from the rest of her neighbours! You can descry her while she is yet afar off. You know where she is calling, and where she is shopping, when you see her blazing team squatting outside—with the surreptitious *huka*—awaiting her reappearance. Now you meet a green and yellow set, next a scarlet and blue, after that, an orange and crimson, jostling others who are all orange. What burlesques of family liveries! What travesties of monograms emblazoned on the bearers' broad chests! Naini-Tal is a pretty place, especially by moonlight, or when the surrounding hills are reflected in the lake. It is in the shape of a cup, or a great extinct crater, and you have to climb a thousand feet to get a view of the line of everlasting snows commanded, as it were, by Nunga-Devi, the "Storm Goddess," standing out sternly against the steel-blue sky. The only flat space is the Mall round the lake, and the polo ground. There are lovely walks, if you do not object to stiff climbing, and once arrived you find yourself, as it were, lost in the woods, among moss and rocks and overhanging trees with thick fringes of ferns covering their outspread

branches. Here you get a peep of the lake—there of the distant blue plains. True, these walks have some drawbacks. They are excessively slippery in damp weather, and panthers lie in wait for dogs (and are particularly partial to fox terriers), moreover, greedy leeches accompany the unsuspecting pedestrian to his, or her, own house. Naini-Tal is gay! What popular hill station is not? Balls, races—yes, races—regattas, and picnics; theatricals, tableaux, and concerts all succeed one another in rapid succession, and when early in May new arrivals come swarming up from the plains, the hotels are crammed, and every day half-a-dozen new sets of jhampannies, carrying a new memsahib, appear on the Mall, and dozens of gallant sahibs come cantering up from the Brewery, with a syce clinging to their ponies' tails, who would believe in that terrible story about Friday, the 18th September, 1880, when, after two days' torrents of rain, during which everyone was a prisoner to the house, and cut off from their neighbours, there was a hollow rumble—then arose a red, dusty cloud, like fire, and when that cloud had dispersed and the mist had lifted, the Assembly Rooms, the Victoria Hotel, and several houses were gone—swept away and engulfed in a moment, and with them a hundred souls. There are occasional little landslips during the monsoon. Rocks come thundering down, tons of earth crumble off, the cart road “goes” annually, but on the whole Naini-Tal is considered as safe as its neighbours. High up on a hill among rocks and trees, in a somewhat inaccessible spot, you come across a board on which is painted “Captain Holroyd, Royal Musketeers,” and near it a box for visitors' cards (which is almost always empty). If you follow the path, you arrive at a dreary-looking, one-storeyed house, with no view, and the reputation of being very damp, and of having a family

of needy panthers among the surrounding rocks. If you penetrated to the drawing-room, the chances are ten to one that you would find Belle cowering over the fire with a shawl on her shoulders and "Mossoo" in her lap, and two to one in a bad temper—both mistress and dog alike victims to ennui. "She was no one up here," she grumbled to Betty every time she saw her. "*She* was a Collector's niece, and asked out to big dinners every night, and taken to picnics up Diopatha and Iopatha, or down to Douglas Dale, but of course that was partly because Mr. Redmond entertained! *She* did not (and so much the better for Naini-Tal). They had got up theatricals—people that knew nothing about them, that could not act one little bit, and they had never even consulted her, or asked her to take a part. Of course that was all jealousy, and pitifully transparent! They had heard of her acting at Lucknow, and Mangobad, and seen the account of it in the papers, and were afraid of her cutting them all out. Her reputation had come up before her (it had indeed), and George said it was too soon after her mother's death to go to balls—George was so peculiar," and so on, in the same strain for about an hour. Belle arrayed her jhampannies in the smartest suits in the station, and excited quite a sensation as she was carried triumphantly along the Mall. But alas! She had only the clothes now, and no *men* to wear them; and without jhampannies a lady is comparatively a prisoner. As a class, these sturdy, jovial, brown hill men are most independent; give them wood tickets, their mornings to themselves, and no late hours, and no heavy passengers—give them smart suits and caps, and warm blankets, and they will take you out once or—peradventure at a pinch—twice a day, without grumbling. But when a lady, be she ever so light, is always calling for them and

harrying them, when she takes them long and steep paths to pay needless visits, and beats them with her parasol, why they figuratively snap their fingers at her and go!—and what is worse, they boycott her in the bazaars. Belle was in a bad plight; she could only join the giddy throng below at the Assembly Rooms, or round the lake, and polo ground, when she could obtain coolies at double fare!

On these days, smartly dressed in what *she* called second mourning, she descended and paraded the Mall with Betty, went out in a wherry with George, had tea and ices at Morrison's shop and enjoyed herself considerably, forgetting for the time her woes, her hateful servants, and her dismal, murky house.

At the opposite end of the lake, in a good situation, you come upon a fine two-storeyed abode, with Mr. Redmond's name on the gate board and Miss Redmond's box full of cards. He was popular, despite his eccentricities; everyone knew that if his bark was loud, his bite was nil; and Betty was much admired as she rode along the Mall and walked on the "Berm" between rows of discriminating British subalterns, sitting on the rails arrayed in boating flannels and gorgeous "blazers." She was in constant request, as Belle had complained, but gave up many a pleasant engagement (to boat, to ride, to play tennis) to climb that weary hill, and to sit with that querulous, discontented little creature; who imperatively demanded her visits, and yet when she came, never ceased to scold her for her dress, her friends, and her airs!

The monsoon broke with a violence peculiar to the Himalayas, the rains descended, and the floods came foaming down the mountains, the same mountains, and the lake being swallowed up in mist, and

all but the most stout-hearted (and booted) were prisoners to the house. Belle was alone. She was laid up with fever, and she wrote such a piteous scrawl, that Betty, in spite of her uncle's angry expostulation, consented to go to her, and cheer her up and stay a week ! She evolved some order in that cheerless home, tidied up the drawing room, put away Belle's old "chits" and papers, and scraps, and "Mossoo's" bones, coaxed some servants into the empty godowns, for there was not one on the premises, but a deaf old ayah and a waterman. Belle enjoyed the transformation and the company of a bright companion, and was better, and out, and gay. At the end of the week, George returned from a signalling class at Ranikhet, rode in quite unexpectedly, and his arrival was an excuse for Betty's immediate departure, but Belle in vehement language that almost bordered on violent words, insisted that her cousin must remain one day longer, in order to be present at a little dinner party that included Captain La Touche and a neighbouring married couple. Her popular cousin was her social trump card ; moreover, she looked to her to make the sweets, and decorate the table.

But when the hour came, although dressed, Belle felt too ill to appear. She had got her feet wet. She had a cold, and sore throat, and she was forced to stay in her own room by the fire, and dine in company with "Mossoo."

She felt excessively irritable and ill-used, as the sounds of merry laughing and talking came from the adjoining dining-room ; *they* were having a very good time, and she—how dull she felt ! She had no amusement, not even a book ; she rose and searched about for something to read. She went, as a last resource, into George's dressing-room, but there she could find no food for her mind, save sundry Manuals of Infantry Drill and of Field Exercises,

and half a dozen red bound "Royal Warrants." She was turning disconsolately away, when her eyes fell upon his *keys*. Of these he was always so careful—so suspiciously careful—and never left them about. Happy thought! She could amuse herself unusually well, in having a good rummage through his dispatch box. Perhaps she would discover some of his secrets. A husband had no business to have secrets from his wife; perhaps she would discover something about what she mentally called "the other girl."

She carried the box into her own room, placed it on a table near the fire, and sat herself deliberately down before it. The key was easily found, and as easily turned in the lock; the lid was thrown open, and the upper tray scrutinised. Nothing but a cheque book, a banker's book, some papers and envelopes, and a Manual on Musketry. In the lower compartment were some of his mother's letters, a packet of paid bills, some recipes for dogs and horses, and at the bottom of all a sealed parcel. She felt it carefully. Yes—it contained a cabinet photograph—the photograph; she must, and would, see what the creature was like.

In a second the cover was torn off. But—but, who was this? holding it to the lamp with a shaking hand.

Betty!

At first, she could not realise the full extent of her discovery, she simply stared, and panted, and trembled. It meant nothing! Then her eye caught sight of the other contents of the packet—a little well-remembered brooch, a withered flower, and a letter in her mother's handwriting.

As she read this, her breast heaved convulsively, the veins in her forehead stood out like cords, her fingers twitched, so that the paper between them rattled and was torn.

When she had come to the very end of it, she sat with her eyes fixed, her hands to her head, as if she had received a galvanic shock. "To think that all along it was Betty, the hypocrite, the viper, the wretch, that robbed me of my husband's love. Oh, how I hate her! How I loathe her! How I wish she was dead! I see it all—all now. She stole him from me that time she went to the Moores, and oh, how false she has been ever since. How well they have kept their secret. I shall never believe in any one again, not in a saint from heaven. And I, poor fool, asking if she *ever* had a love affair! Oh, I could tear her to pieces. I could, I could," and she gnashed her teeth, and clenched her hands, and "Mossoo," fled into hiding under a chest of drawers.

Not a thought of remorse for two lives sacrificed for her, not a thought of any one but herself, and her wrongs.

Now, she saw why George avoided Betty, at least, in public; now by the light of her discovery she saw every thing; many puzzling circumstances were as plain as A, B, C, and here, at this present moment, that abominable girl was under her roof, sitting in *her* place, and entertaining her guests! Oh! Oh! Oh! it was past all endurance, and she began to pace the room almost at a run; her fury rising like a gale at sundown. She must wait (if she could) till those people had gone; it was after eleven; they must leave soon, and *then*—

It was a fearful night. Thunder rolled and crashed among the mountains, the rain came down on the zinc roof with a deafening roar, the paths were foaming water-courses, the water-courses boiling rivers; and now and then a furious blast shook the house to its foundation.

At last the laughing and talking ceased, the merry company had departed. She saw their

lanterns dimly through the mist, and instantly rushed into the drawing-room. Betty was there busily putting away cards and counters, and George, who had been speeding his guests, stood in the doorway.

In her furious precipitation, Belle knocked over a chair, and they both turned and saw her—saw her livid, distorted face, compressed lips and glittering eyes—that looked as if they were illuminated by some inward flame—and knew but too well what these signs portended.

"So," she screamed, her piercing voice distinct above the thundering rain. "So I have found you both out at last! Oh! you false wretch," shaking her own photograph at Betty, "how I would like to strangle you! You, that we all thought so quiet, so modest, and that was engaged all the time on the sly. You artful, bad girl, you robbed me—*me*—of his affections," pointing to George. "He liked me first, he liked me best. He dares not deny it! I must say this for him, that whatever he is, he is no liar."

All the time she was speaking—screaming, it might be called—she was tearing the photograph into atoms, with feverish, frenzied fingers, and with the word *liar*, she dashed them into Betty's face.

"Belle," said her husband sternly, "what are you about? Have you taken leave of your senses? What do you mean by treating your cousin in this way?"

"There," she shrieked, "there, you take her part. You try and blind me still! Have I gone out of my senses? No, but I am *going* out of them! I have opened your box, I have read my mother's letter. I know all. How dared you marry me?"

After this question, there was a pause for ten seconds, the rain and wind alone broke the silence,

whilst the raging woman, from whom every restraint had fallen away, awaited his answer.

"I married you," speaking with painful slowness, "because I thought it was the only thing to be done under the circumstances. I did my best to make you happy, I hoped——"

"Hoped! Thought!" she interrupted, shaking from head to foot. "Who cares what you hoped or thought?" And then she broke into a torrent of passion, in which scathing, scorching words seemed to pour from her lips one over the other, like a stream of lava. This, to the couple who had been mercilessly sacrificed for her advantage.

"Betty," said George abruptly, "this is no scene for you; go to your own room."

"To her room! go out of the house, go *now*!" cried Belle, stamping her foot, "now, this second, do you hear me?"

"To-morrow," interrupted her husband, "not to-night, you could not turn a dog out in such weather."

"No, but I would turn out a snake, a viper, a cobra."

"You may be certain that Betty is not anxious to trespass on your hospitality, but she will stay as a favour, she shall not go out on such a night, I will not allow it," he returned firmly.

"Very well then, *I'll* go! The Burns will take me in. I refuse to remain under the same roof with that girl for another five minutes."

"Do not be afraid, Belle, I will go," said Betty, who had been hitherto too stunned to move or speak. "I will go this moment. You are a cruel woman, you have wronged both George and me, and you will be sorry for all you have said to-morrow."

Belle's voice drowned hers in furious protestations to the contrary, and she hastened away,

threw on a waterproof, and twisted a scarf round her head, whilst George called for a syce and a lantern.

"Belle," he said, as he re-entered, putting on his top-coat, and his face looked white and set. "This is about the last straw! God knows that I have done my best, or tried to do my best for you. After this we will live apart—apart for ever."

Before she had time to reply, he was gone, he had quitted the room, and she saw him and Betty go forth into the sheets of rain, and the black surrounding darkness, in the wake of a syce with an oilskin cape over his head, and a lantern in his hand. She watched the trio go down the hill, till they and their flickering light were lost to sight.

Then she went and sat down beside the dying fire—feeling somewhat exhausted—and assured herself that she had done well, had acted as any other wife of spirit would have done, but her fury was abating and her confidence with it; cold remorse began to whisper in her ear, as she listened to the booming of the thunder and the roaring of the rain; they had nearly three miles to go by the long road, and Betty was in her evening dress and shoes! Of course George did not care for Betty *now*; even her distorted mind could not summon the ghost of a charge against him. She glanced over past months, with the piercing eye of a jealous wife. No, there was not a word or a glance, by which she could arraign him.

He had got over it ages ago. Betty would marry some wealthy man, and George was *her* husband. She must forgive them! At the end of half-an-hour's solitary meditation, during which she had reckoned up her probable allowance and probable prospects at home, she actually had absolved them both. Betty had no business to have had an understanding with George when she

was a mere child—and of course did not know her own mind ; but Betty had always been good to her, forbearing, generous, and useful. Only that very morning she had cooked her a dainty little dish to tempt her appetite, and she had gone down in all the rain to get her a remedy for her cold, and a novel from the library.

And George? yes, he was good to her too ; he never refused her money, he never flirted with other women, he always remembered her birthday, he wrote regularly when she was from home, and punctually met her at the station on her return. If he was cold and reserved, and hated French poodles, it was his nature, and he could not help himself. Looking round among the Lords and Masters of her acquaintances, she could not name a woman who had a better husband than her own.

And supposing he had really meant what he said? There was a strange expression in his eyes,—a look that she had never seen there before, not even after she threw the tennis-bat at Mrs. Monkton! and once, in a passion, another lady told her that she wondered Mr. Holroyd did not get a divorce for incompatibility of temper! But no, no ; nothing but death should ever part them. Her Australian trip had shown her one thing most distinctly—that alone, and unprotected by her popular, gentlemanly husband, she was a very helpless and insignificant little person. What was she to do? Perhaps he would never come back! The bare idea filled her with dismay. She was now all penitence (as usual). She would follow them instantly to Mr. Redmond's door. She would make it up ; she would abase herself ; she would go by the short cut across the hill, and be there almost as soon as they were! No sooner thought than done. She ran into her room, and put on a cloak, and a pair of strong shoes, and

going into the back verandah, called imperatively for a lamp and a guide.

But what hill servant, sleeping comfortably in his "comlee, would respond to the screams of a bad memsahib—demanding a light and attendant, at one o'clock, and on such a night? As she had sowed, she reaped. No answer came, not a sound, not a sign, from the cluster of godowns at the back; for once she refrained from rousing them in person. She had no time to lose. She was obliged to hunt up a lantern, and to light and carry it herself; and, with "Mossoo" for her sole escort, she set forth in the streaming downpour, and started rapidly up the hill.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"IN WHICH BELLE'S WISH IS FULFILLED."

"Covering with moss the dead's uncloséd eye
The little red breast teacheth charity."

BETTY almost ran down the footpath, her feet shod with indignation, and refused her companion's proffered arm with a sharp gesture, that was nearer akin to passion than politeness. At first she hurried along bravely enough, but afterwards more slowly and painfully. What are bronze shoes, and silk stockings, among rocks and broken branches, and overflowing water-courses? One of her feet was badly cut, her hair had been blown adrift by the stormy rain that beat her and buffeted her so mercilessly. At last she was compelled to cling to the arm she had scorned; for as she stumbled forward in the wake of the blinking lantern and shivering syce, furious gusts of wind came sweeping down between Cheena and Diopatha, and threatened to carry her off her balance, and to extinguish the light. The pair made no attempt

to speak, for their voices would have been lost amid the crash of the thunder, and the hollow roar of the torrents, as they tumbled tumultuously down the ravines, and poured into the lake with the noise of an explosion. Amid the unchanging fury of the storm, there were intervals of blinding light, alternating with spells of utter darkness. Once, in a comparatively sheltered spot, Betty halted to twist up her hair. As she did so, a dazzling white flash lit up the dark surrounding hills—the grey sheets of rain pattering into the lake—the streaming path—themselves.

There was a momentary lull, as if the raving, screaming wind was taking breath, and Betty said tremulously, but with perfect distinctness:

"George, to-night it must be *good-bye* between us; you will understand that it cannot be otherwise."

"Yes," he returned hoarsely, "I could never ask you to run the risk of such another scene. It must be as you say—God help us!"

A second flash, bright as day, illumined his face; it was ashen; and in the haggard eyes so near to hers there was a look of wistfulness and despair—such an agonised look, as the eyes of the dying wear when they take leave of those they love best, and pass away, alone, into that undiscovered country.

In a moment, all was black again, and once more the pair resumed that struggle onwards, arm in arm, staggering against the wind, and wrapped in the darkness and the silence of their own thoughts. After half an hour's scrambling and groping, and climbing of slippery paths that ran with water, bruised, drenched, beaten and breathless, they arrived at their destination, and were vociferously announced by the barking of half a dozen curs of high and low degree.

Mr. Redmond always retired late, and was still sitting up ; reading—no—not a treatise on jurisprudence, but a French novel ; he came in his dressing-gown and spectacles, and opened the door in person, and beheld his niece in a soaking evening dress, bareheaded, and almost barefoot ; and Holroyd looking ghastly, with the rain pouring off his cap and moustache.

"What—what does this mean ?" he demanded in a voice in which anger and amazement struggled for mastery. "Do you wish to murder the girl—sir—that you bring her out in such a plight on such a night ?"

"I am more sorry than I can say, but I could not help it—I——"

"Come in, come in, man alive ! and don't stand dripping there, come in and explain yourself !"

"Uncle Bernard," said Betty, taking off her cloak and throwing back her wringing hair. "He cannot explain—Belle and I have had a quarrel."

"A quarrel about what ?" turning the lamp full on her colourless face. Dead silence.

"There has been more than a quarrel ! There is something in the back-ground. Holroyd, you don't leave my house till you explain the whole business."

"Oh, uncle, do not keep him," expostulated Betty. "Don't you see how wet he is ?"

"Then *you* shall tell me, run away at once, and put on dry clothes. I shall not go to bed till I have come to the bottom of this affair ! What will every one say when they hear that your cousin turned you out of doors in the middle of such a night ? Holroyd, in common Christian charity I must give you something to drink. I don't want to have your death on my head, but mind you, I have not done with you. Have some old brandy, neat ?"

"No, thank you, I must go," and he glanced at Betty.

"Yes," she said, approaching him quickly as she spoke. "You must forgive Belle; she will be very sorry; forgive her as a favour to *me*. Remember," she added, almost in a whisper, "what you promised me last Christmas. *Good-bye*." Her lips trembled, whilst her eyes dismissed him.

"Good-bye," he echoed, in a husky voice, wringing her hand as he spoke. In another second he was gone—gone without a word or glance towards Mr. Redmond, and was hurrying down the hill at breakneck speed.

"Must I tell you, Uncle Bernard?" said Betty, when, after a short interval, she returned to the sitting-room, in a long, white, woollen gown, and with her hair hanging over her shoulders.

"Yes, you must tell me everything, and you must drink this cherry brandy."

"I would so much rather not do one or the other."

"And you will have to do *both*."

"Then, Uncle Bernard, remember you make me tell what I have never told to a soul," and her eyes flashed at him through tears of passionate pain. "But you stand in the place of my father."

"I do, and you stand to me in the place of a daughter. Begin what you have to say—at once."

"I—I—how can I begin?" she said, shading her face with her hands. "I knew George Holroyd very well three years ago. I was a good deal at Bridgetstown with his mother and sister, and— and—" she hesitated

"And he made love to you," continued her uncle bluntly.

"He could not marry, for he had no money; he was supporting his mother and sister, and he had but little besides his pay."

"I am surprised he did not ask you to share *that!*" sneered her listener.

"No, no, he would not bind me to any promise, but he said that if his prospects improved—he would write."

"And he never did. Oh, oh—I see it all!"

"Yes, he wrote and enclosed the letter to Mrs. Redmond, but Mrs. Redmond wanted him to marry her own daughter. She scratched out my name—and gave the letter to Belle."

"What!" shouted Mr. Redmond, rising to his feet, "what mad woman's nonsense is this?"

"It is true: the letter seemed to apply to either of us. Belle thought he liked her—she hated Noone, she was glad to get away from it—at any price," she gasped, in short and breathless sentences.

"And *you* paid the price?"

To this question Betty gave no answer or sign, beyond a slight quivering of the lips.

"Well, go on," continued the Collector imperiously.

"I never knew the truth, until Mrs. Redmond was dying, and then she told me all. Belle went out to Bombay in complete ignorance, and George met her, and married her."

"The fool! the maniac! the great idiot!" cried Mr. Redmond, throwing up his hands. "He must have been out of his mind."

"He believed that he was acting for the best," said Betty, with a kind of proud severity, "and I think he did right; what would have become of Belle, destitute and friendless? He has always kept his secret till now, but she opened his despatch box, and read her mother's letter; she never had a suspicion of the truth till to-night."

"And the effect of her discovery?"

"Was to turn me instantly out of her house, but

I know she will be sorry to-morrow—she always is."

"Well—well—well," turning about and pacing the room, with his hands clasped behind him under his dressing-gown. "I am fifty years of age, and this story—this extraordinary story—transcends everything in my experience either at home or abroad. Poor Holroyd, unfortunate devil! Betty, you will never cross her threshold, and never speak a word to that termagant again."

"No, nor to him either, uncle; we agreed to-night that we would be strangers for the future."

"Oh, ha, hum," stroking his chin; "well I dare say you are right, you can't cut a woman and know her husband."

"And now, Uncle Bernard, I am so very, very tired, you will let me go, won't you?"

She looked haggard and completely exhausted, her face was as white as her gown.

The horror and shame of Belle's outbreak, that terrible walk through rain and darkness, the ordeal of having to lay bare her secret to her uncle, had been too much, even for her fortitude.

"Come and kiss me, Betty. I declare you are a good girl, you are a true Redmond, and have a fine moral back-bone. Poor Betty, you have had a hard part to play."

She approached and laid her lips softly on his forehead—lips that were icy cold; she was so grave, and pale, and so utterly unlike herself, that her uncle was slightly awed, and suffered her to depart in silence.

Mr. Redmond still sat up, and actually lit a cigar to soothe his ruffled feelings, and to re-arrange his thoughts.

"That old Redmond woman ought to have been transported. Supposing Betty had got the letter all right, and come out and married Holroyd?"

Well, he liked him, he used to be a capital fellow, but as it was, Betty could do far better, and marry someone in his own service."

Poor Holroyd! he had made him his confidante about Hammond too. Yes, that was certainly an awkward mistake. It could not be possible that Betty had still—no—no, out of the question. However, she was a sensible girl, they had better be strangers in future, but he himself was not going to give up George's acquaintance (man-like, he considered that a woman could easily make sacrifices that were disagreeable and unnecessary for him). They could still meet and dine at the club they could go out shooting together. As to George's wife, to relinquish *her* society was no hardship.

Meanwhile Captain Holroyd was returning homewards with headlong speed; he had now no girl companion to guide and protect, and as for himself, he did not care. At first he determined to go to an hotel, or the club, for the remainder of the night, but on second thoughts, he changed his mind. He had never been one to send the family linen to the public wash. He would endure to the end—and this was almost the end. It required a man with a more hopeful buoyant nature than his to resist sinking under the weight of his surroundings. He would abandon the struggle once for all. The life he led was not the existence of a self-respecting human being—it was the life of a dog. He would offer Belle a tempting allowance, leaving himself just sufficient for bare necessities; he would tell her that he could endure her society no longer, and that she must accept it, and go—go home. If not, if she made a scandal, as she had once threatened, he would sell out, and join some exploring party in Africa, Australia, or Central America. Part they must; he was past the days of piteous protestations, caresses, and hysterics, and

he was about to shape the rest of his life in another form. Belle and her mother had ruined his happiness; he was an embittered, disheartened, truly miserable man. All his best friends could give him was pity and sympathy. As to what "might have been," he dared not trust himself to glance at it. He would free himself from Belle, and put half the world between himself and Betty.

With this stern resolution in his mind, he found himself once more at home—the door stood wide open, the lamp was flaring in the drawing-room, and that apartment was precisely as he had left it—with the overturned chair, and torn photograph, lying on the ground—but empty. Where was Belle? The house seemed unnaturally quiet; he looked into her bedroom, a pair of slippers lay in the middle of the floor, as if they had been hastily kicked off. He called; there was no reply; he searched, he took the lantern and went outside; the rain was abating, for it was near dawn. He held the light close to the ground, and saw the fresh footprints of two small shoes; they went up the hill, not down. In an instant the truth flashed upon him. In a fit of remorse, Belle had followed them and gone by the short cut—the "closed" road. He seized the lantern, now burning very faintly, and set out at once in pursuit; for more than a mile, he followed the pathway, now ascending, now descending, sometimes between rocks, sometimes between trees, sometimes along the bare edge of a sheer naked precipice; and then the lamp went out, but as a faint grey light came creeping through the mists, he was able to make his way on at a steady pace, though his heart thumped loudly against his ribs, and his nerves were strung to their utmost tension, for a chill shadow of apprehension seemed to stalk beside him! Suddenly, turning a sharp corner, he was

brought to a standstill, by a ghastly break in the narrow track. The hill above had slipped down five hundred feet, carrying with it, rocks, trees and pathway ; loose showers of little stones were still trickling lakewards, and as the dawn came stealing over the crest of Cheena, and penetrated through the dispersing clouds, George was aware of a small white object, a dog—shivering miserably on the brink of the gaping chasm, or running to and fro, with every token of anguish and despair.

Belle's wish had been accomplished. "Mossoo" survived her.

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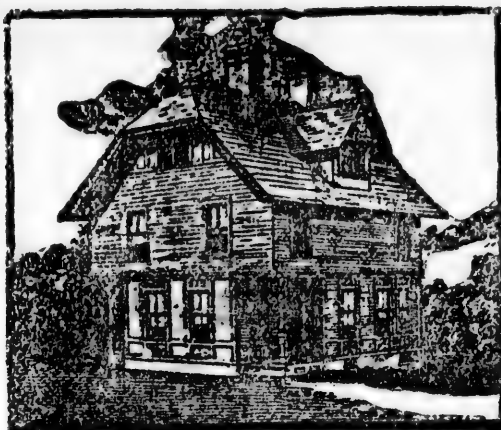
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